

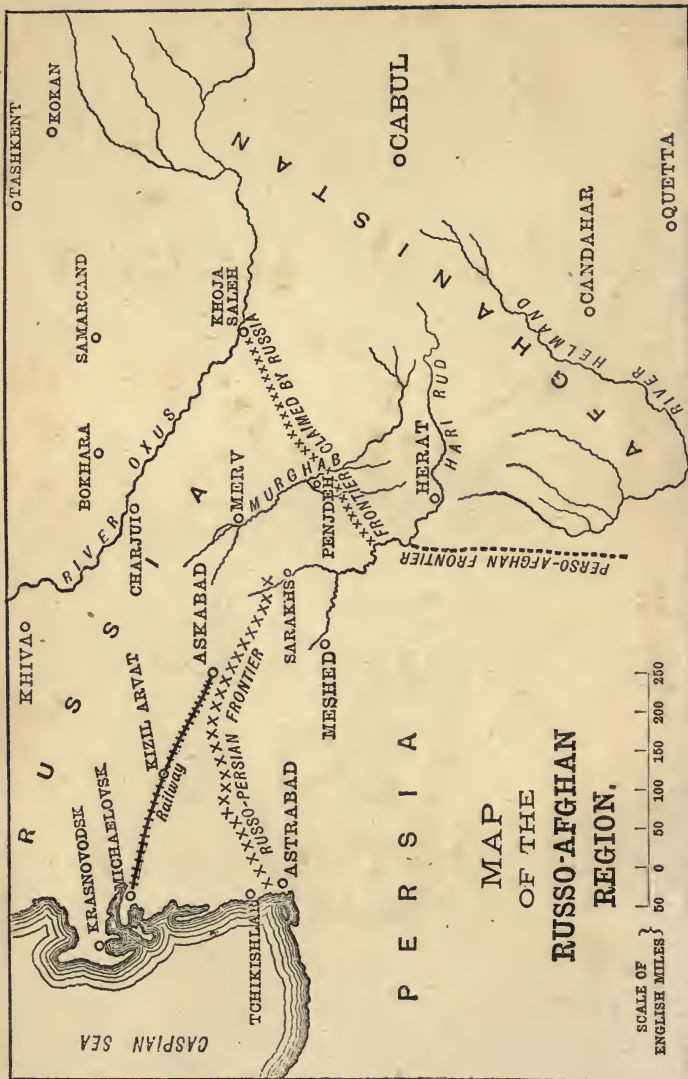


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MAP OF THE RUSSO-AFGHAN REGION.

SCALE OF }
ENGLISH MILES } 50 0 50 100 150 200 250

THE
RUSSIANS
AT THE
GATES OF HERAT

BY
CHARLES MARVIN,
AUTHOR OF "THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE TOWARDS INDIA," "MERV, THE
QUEEN OF THE WORLD," "RECONNOITRING CENTRAL ASIA," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS.



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PREFACE.

IN my "Russian Advance Towards India," published in 1882, I made these remarks :—"In my writings on Russia I try to be impartial. I know I have a greater love for Russia, the country of my youth, and a better appreciation of the Russian people, than the so-called 'Russophile' traders in politics, who lauded her indiscriminately in 1877, from motives of self or party interest, and abandoned her afterwards to false attacks; and the public know, from my writings, that I am a vigilant and anxious observer of the Russian advance towards India. I am thus, I suppose, both a Russophile and a Russophobe. As for my local opinions, my youth was passed in a country which has no political parties corresponding with our Liberal and Conservative factions, and does not want them; while my studies have led me to survey politics from the standpoint of one who considers himself more in the light of a citizen of the English Empire—of that great empire that embraces the five empires of England, of Canada, of Australia, of South Africa, and of India—than merely a Liberal or Conservative Englishman of Lesser England only. Being, in this sense, an Imperialist, and a non-party writer, I claim immunity from any charge of unduly favouring Liberal or Conservative policy in my remarks on the Central Asian Question. At the

same time, I would have it with equal clearness understood, that the opinions expressed are not merely the heedless and ephemeral views of an irresponsible writer, but the deep conviction of one who is conscious that they may some day be called up against him, in other spheres than that of Journalism and Literature."

These remarks cover all that I need say by way of a preface to the present volume, except that the entire work having been written and got out in eight days, I may ask indulgence for any errors that may have escaped my eye in the volume.

CHARLES MARVIN.

GROSVENOR HOUSE,
PLUMSTEAD COMMON, KENT
March 23rd, 1885.

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THE RUSSIANS AT THE GATES OF HERAT.

CHAPTER I.

HOW ALIKHANOFF FIRST WENT TO MERV.

The landing of the Russians at Krasnovodsk—Early Turcoman campaigns—Alikhanoff joins Lomakin's army as a private soldier—Acts as special correspondent of the *Moscow Gazette*—Skobelev's siege of Geok Tepé—Russia determines to secure a military survey of Merv—Alikhanoff proceeds to the oasis disguised as a trader—How he obtained plans of the fortress—Persuades Mahdum Kuli, the principal Merv warrior, to attend the Tsar's coronation at Moscow.

THERE are two Russian movements in the direction of India. One originated at Orenburg, and had for its objective Cabul. Commencing before the Crimean war it rapidly developed itself afterwards, and engulfed in succession the Kirghiz tribes and the khanates of Khokand, Bokhara, and Khiva. Practically speaking, this movement ceased shortly before the last Turkish war, and has not been continued since. The interest in Turkestan for the moment, therefore, being purely historical, we may exclude an account of the advance in the direction of Cabul from this volume.

The second movement was from the Caspian, and had for its objective Herat. A deal of confusion and bad statesmanship has arisen from confounding this advance with that made from Orenburg and Tashkent. The troops have been always different, the officials different, and conditions regulating the advance different. We have only to specify one popular error to show how essential it is that the public

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should clearly realize the difference between the two movements. For instance, it is often said that colossal mountain ranges bar the Russian advance to the Indian frontier. This is quite true as regards troops marching from Tashkent and Samarcand upon Cabul and Peshawur. The lofty Hindoo Koosh, that must be traversed to reach the Amēer's capital, ranges in height from 15,000 to 20,000 feet. But there is nothing of the kind between the Caspian and Herat, nor yet again between Herat and the Indo-Afghan frontier. Setting out from Krasnovodsk, a Russian could drive a four-in-hand all the way to the Indian frontier near Quetta.

If this fact be clearly borne in mind, the reader will readily understand why the Russian advance has been so rapid since Skobelev broke down the Turcoman barrier, and will appreciate how essential it is that the disadvantage of there being no physical obstacle to a powerful military movement from the Caspian should not be enhanced by allowing Russia to secure the great midway camping ground of Herat.

In the time of Peter the Great, and again in the reign of Nicholas, Russia seized points on the East Caspian Coast, but the so-called Caspian advance towards India did not definitely commence until a descent was made upon Krasnovodsk in 1869. In the autumn of that year a flotilla left the Caucasus port of Petrovsk, and landed on the opposite side of the Caspian a few Cossacks and infantrymen, and half a dozen guns. Attached to this expedition were three men who subsequently figured prominently in Central Asian history. One was Stolietoff, the envoy Russia sent to Cabul in 1878, the second Grodekoff, who made a famous ride to Herat in the same year, and the third Captain Skobelev, then a harum-scarum subaltern.

"We made a great mistake when we landed at Krasnovodsk," said the latter to me, shortly before his death. "Instead of going ahead we dawdled about, reconnoitring

the country. A strong, forward movement was not approved of by the Government. The result was, we gradually taught the Turcomans how to fight, and at last they fought so well that it needed a series of great campaigns to crush them."

Our space is too limited to describe in detail those reconnoitings and skirmishes which, during the period from 1869 to 1878, converted the Tekke Turcoman from an undisciplined horseman into a skilful builder of big redoubts. No headway whatever was made after Skobelev left in 1873 to join the expedition to Khiva, and a long series of reverses culminated in a crushing defeat and rout of the Russians at Geok Tepé in the autumn of 1879.

This was the campaign in which two notable personages participated — Mr. Edmund O'Donovan, and Private Alikhanoff. The former was attached to General Lazareff's force, and spent the whole of the summer in the Caspian. Unluckily he fell ill when the advance took place, and was thus debarred from seeing anything of the fighting. What we know of the campaign is mainly derived from the letters of a few Russians attached to the force. The best appeared in the columns of the *Moscow Gazette*, and were signed "Arsky." The writer was Alikhanoff, the present Governor of Merv.*

This Alikhanoff is a very remarkable man. He was born at Baku, and by birth is a Daghestani. Russia's Asiatic subjects have a happy way of identifying themselves with their masters, which our language renders impossible in the case of India—they turn their names into Russian ones, by placing an "off" (son) at the end of them. Alikhanoff is simply Ali Khan, with an "off" added to it. When Sir Peter Lumsden proceeded to the Afghan frontier, he took with him from London a very accomplished Indian official as interpreter also, curiously enough, one "Ali Khan." But England had

* See "The Disastrous Russian Campaign against the Turcomans." London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1880.

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failed to effect such a transformation with her Ali Khan as Russia has with hers. I saw him depart from Charing Cross. He was highly educated and thoroughly devoted to England; but he had never thought of identifying himself with us by changing his name from Ali Khan into Mr. Alikhanson, or, better still, Mr. Alison.

The case is totally different in Russia's Asiatic provinces. The people not only identify themselves with the Russians, but the Russians identify themselves with the people. Englishmen would never think of placing their home army under a Sikh or a Mahratta, or permitting a Bengali to become a Cabinet Minister. An Indian has practically no career in England; on the other hand, every avenue in Russia is open to the Caucasian. The Armenian, Loris Melikoff, rose there to a position next to that of the Tsar. Generals Tergoukasoff and Lazareff, two other Asiatics, commanded Russian troops in the Turkish war of 1877-78, and when Alikhanoff accomplished his famous raid upon Merv, the exploit was extolled as a Russian exploit, and not as the achievement of a mere native.

Alikhanoff received a good education, and developed a remarkable talent for drawing. Skilful with pen and pencil, had he lived in England he would have doubtless become one of the foremost correspondents of the day. At an early age he entered the army, and after serving in the Khivan expedition as a captain of the cavalry under Skobelev, received the appointment of aide-de-camp to the Grand Duke Michael, Viceroy of the Caucasus. At the close of the Turkish war he suddenly fell into disgrace. A quarrel occurred between him and a superior officer, and he challenged him to fight a duel. The true particulars of this affair have never publicly transpired. Some say Alikhanoff was a boisterous officer, given to insulting people when in his cups; others that his superior officer was a scamp, hated by everybody in the regi-

ment. Whichever story is correct, Alikhanoff was tried by court-martial, deprived of all his appointments and decorations, and reduced to the condition of a common soldier.

"You need to measure soldiers by a different standard from that which you apply to civilians," said Skobelev to the writer in 1882. "I have had much experience in warfare, and have found that the men who fight best are precisely those who are apt to be troublesome in time of peace. A government should be always very indulgent to its troops in time of peace. Those who are most difficult to deal with in time of peace often prove to be the best fighters in time of war."

Skobelev's remarks referred to General Valentine Baker, whom he characterised as our "one good general." We were discussing the different modes of treating officers in disgrace adopted by England and Russia. In England we dismiss from the army an officer who has made a false step, and however good a man he may be professionally, he is practically lost to the country. In Russia, on the other hand, he is simply reduced to the ranks, stripped of his titles, and sent to some frontier district in Asia to serve as a private soldier. Such a man naturally becomes a desperado, and forms capital material for leaders of the stamp of Skobelev. In many cases they retrieve their reputation, and it is the custom, if they display extraordinary courage, or render any particular service, to restore them at a stroke to their former position. This was done in the case of Alikhanoff, when he successfully accomplished his swoop upon Merv. It is obvious that the presence of such inflammable materials on the Russian frontier is even far more dangerous to peace, than the predatory characteristics of the Afghan tribes Russian diplomats make so much fuss about.

Alikhanoff fell into disgrace about the time General Lomakin returned to the Caspian from an unsuccessful attack upon

the Tekke strongholds in Akhal. He at once elected to be sent to Tchikishlar to join the expedition General Lazareff was preparing to lead against the tribesmen. There he met O'Donovan, and one of the last letters that lamented correspondent wrote to me before proceeding to the Soudan contained a request that I should give his hearty wishes to Alikhanoff, if I met him during my journey in the Caspian. He said Alikhanoff was a "capital fellow, a brave and capable soldier, and was much liked in the camp."

During this campaign Alikhanoff attained the highest rank as a non-commissioned officer. When Skobelev arrived the following year to retrieve the broken fortunes of the Lazareff-Lomakin expedition, he was accorded every opportunity of distinguishing himself. However, attached to the force were so many heroes, as dashing as himself, that his exploits were lost among the crowd of their achievements.

The history of Skobelev's siege of Geok Tepé yet remains to be written. O'Donovan saw nothing of it, except the final rout through a telescope from a hill on the Perso-Turcoman frontier. Hence he left it undescribed in his book on Merv. None the less, it was a campaign full of exciting incident, and a clear account of it would be very popular in this country.

Retreating from their line of settlements, stretching along the Akhal oasis from Kizil Arvat to Geok Tepé, the Tekkes collected to the number of 40,000 families at the latter place, and forming a camp, with tents pitched closely one against the other, built round it a huge clay wall, reminding the Russians of an immense railway embankment. The defence was mainly controlled by two chiefs, Makdum Kuli Khan and Tekme Sardar. The latter had submitted to Russia the year before, but being badly treated by Lomakin, had fled the camp and joined his countrymen afresh. They were instructed in the art of building rapidly large earthworks,

after the manner he had observed practised by the Russians during their advance.

The expedition the previous year had been despatched up the Atrek river, from its mouth at Tchikishlar. Skobelev changed the base to Krasnovodsk, or more properly to Port Michaelovsk, a small harbour on the south-east side of Krasnovodsk Bay, and considerably nearer Akhal. It is from this point that the railway now runs in the direction of India.

At that time the Turcoman barrier was considered so difficult to break down, that Russia was ready to resort to extraordinary efforts to hasten the submission of the tribes. During the debates on Candahar, Lord Salisbury said he had always believed that the Turcoman barrier would last his lifetime. Even in Russia, so severe was the resistance apprehended, that General Tergoukasoff, Skobelev's predecessor, did not think that the barrier could be broken with less than three years' hard fighting. To quicken matters, Russia therefore selected Skobelev for the task, and very wisely gave him *carte blanche* as to the resources he was to employ to accomplish it.

Stowed away in the magazines at Bender, on the south-west frontier, were one hundred miles of railway, which Russia had purchased to use in the Balkan peninsula in the event of a failure of the Berlin Congress. At Skobelev's request, the line was shifted to the Caspian, and laid down in the direction of Geok Tepé. In this casual manner originated the Russian railway to India, which has effected so many changes in Central Asia, and promises to completely revolutionise the relations of England and Russia with the region.

The railway, however, proved of very little service in the actual campaign, and we may, therefore, reserve an account of it for a future chapter. While it was being built Skobelev

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pushed on a force to Bami, the first stronghold of any size in the Akhal oasis, and there gradually accumulated the munitions of war and food supplies essential for the siege. When everything was ready he advanced to Geok Tepé, and, seizing a fortified point close to the walls, commenced the attack upon the fortress.

The Tekke stronghold was fully as difficult to take as the Russians had expected. Their artillery made no impression upon the huge clay rampart; they had, therefore, to resort to every form of siege operations to reduce the fortress. The conflict lasted nearly a month, during which the Russians suffered heavy losses, and experienced severe privations. Step by step, however, Skobelev pushed his way until he got close enough to sink a mine, which was carried to the foot of the rampart. At the same time, his 69 guns fired daily from 100 to 500 shots into the place, and the expenditure of ammunition by the infantry ranged from 10,000 to 70,000 rounds.

The brunt of the attack fell upon General Kouropatkin, commanding the Turkestan contingent. As this officer is spoken of as likely to command the Russian army, in the event of a conflict at the gates of Herat, it may be well to take advantage of the opportunity to say a few words about him.

Among rising Russian generals, there is probably no one more admired by the army than Kouropatkin. He was Skobelev's right hand man in most of his campaigns. He served with him in the Khivan expedition, and in the Khokandese campaign. He acted as chief of his staff at Plevna, and during the march upon Constantinople, and he exercised immediate control, under Skobelev, of the forces before Geok Tepé.

When Skobelev was appointed to the command of the army against the Turcomans, one of his first acts was to telegraph to Kouropatkin, then on the Kuldja frontier, to join him with a contingent of Turkestan troops. His march across Central



GENERAL KOUROPATKIN.

Asia excited universal admiration at the time. After being weeks on the road, proceeding from Tashkent to Khiva, Kouropatkin had to accomplish a difficult march across the desert, by a route almost unknown, to the concentrating point of Bami. General Annenkoff was at Bami at the time, and went out to meet him. "Kouropatkin," said he to me, in dilating enthusiastically on this achievement—"Kouropatkin had been 26 days marching over a sandy and waterless desert; yet his force marched in clean and trim, and as fresh as a daisy."

When, at the invitation of Skobelev's friends, I accompanied the funeral party, conveying the body of that great hero from Moscow to its last resting-place at Spasskoe Selo, in South Russia, in 1882, I was thrown for several days among Skobelev's favourite officers; and more than once I heard a controversy among them as to whether Kouropatkin was not almost as good a leader as their lost general. "Kouropatkin," said a Turkestan officer to me, during one of these discussions, "possesses all the characteristics of Skobelev, cast in a cooler mould. They worked admirably together, Kouropatkin imparting coolness and calculation to Skobelev, and Skobelev fire and enthusiasm to Kouropatkin. I am quite desolate now that Skobelev is gone"—here his eyes filled with tears—"but it is a consolation to all of us that we have still got Kouropatkin. He is now the Skobelev of Russia."

During the first few days succeeding Skobelev's death, a strong and angry feeling prevailed in Russia against the Government. It was felt that the deceased hero's merits had never been properly appreciated by the State, and I encountered various officers at Moscow who were persuaded he had been poisoned. To appease the army, the Emperor felt he could not do better than summon Kouropatkin from Central Asia and give him a high appointment at home. Since then he has been treated as a favourite at Court, and if he

has secured no notoriety abroad, it is simply because he has always devoted himself to his profession, and left politics alone. Skobeleff had in him all the elements of a great statesman, as well as those of a great general. His political influence was becoming positively embarrassing to the Tsar's ministers when he died. Kouropatkin has never sought to form a party in Russia—he is quite content to be a great general, and nothing more.

During the siege of Geok Tepé he had charge of the advanced positions, and displayed extraordinary coolness and courage. Unobtrusive almost to a fault, he carefully supervised the mechanical part of the siege operations, while Skobeleff applied himself to keeping the troops in that rollicking, reckless mood he considered so essential in the presence of the enemy. Seated at the mouth of the mine, Skobeleff used to time the progress of the sappers underground, tunnelling in the direction of the fortress. If the officer in charge accomplished the specified portion in less than the time fixed, he was kissed and caressed, and perhaps treated to champagne or vodky; if the reverse was the case, he was roundly abused before all the soldiers.

Throughout the greater part of the siege Alikhanoff, who was now a cornet of the Pereslaff Dragoons, was employed in foraging operations, or reconnoitring that portion of the fortress, facing the desert, which was uninvested by the Russians.

At length the day of the assault arrived. More than a ton of gunpowder was laid at the head of the mine, immediately under the rampart, and, on being fired, laid bare a broad entrance into the enemy's defences. Through this and another breach made by the artillery the Russians rushed into the place, and perpetrated all the horrors usual when orders are given to infuriated and semi-barbarous troops to give no quarter to either sex.

Even when the Turcomans, no longer offering resistance, streamed out in a disorderly mob across the desert in the direction of Merv, men, women, and children mingled together, no mercy was shown to them. Artillery followed in their rear, and mowed them down, until darkness put an end to the pursuit. During that short few hours' chase the 1,000 pursuing Russians slaughtered 8,000 of the fugitives. Hundreds of women were sabred. 6,500 bodies were also afterwards found inside the fortress. At Kertch the year before last I met an Armenian Jew, Samuel Gourovitch, who had accompanied as interpreter a secret Russian mission to Cabul in 1882, and was present at the sack of Geok Tepé. He told me that the carnage was fearful.

"One thousand Russians cut down 8,000 Turcomans in a few hours. The whole country was covered with corpses. The morning after the battle they lay in rows, like freshly-mown hay, as they had been swept down by the mitrailleurs and artillery. I myself saw babies bayoneted or slashed to pieces. Many women were ravished before being killed."

"But Skobeleff told me that not a woman had been dishonoured."

"Lots were," he replied, energetically. "They were ravished by the soldiers before my eyes. Skobeleff may not have known it. I could tell you many horrible things that took place; but (tapping his lips significantly) it is better to be silent in this world. The plunder at Geok Tepé was immense. The troops were allowed to get drink, plunder, and kill for three days after the assault."

During the actual assault, and in the subsequent pursuit the infantry engaged fired 273,804 rounds, the cavalry 12,510, and the artillery 5,864 rounds; 224 military rockets were also expended. The total loss of the Turcomans during the siege was estimated by Skobeleff at 20,000. In other words, half the defenders perished.

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The two leaders, Tekme Sardar and Makdum Kuli, escaped, and fled to Merv. Pushing on in their rear, Skobelev occupied Askabad, the capital of the Akhal Tekkes, twenty-seven miles east of Geok Tepé, and despatched Kouropatkin thence almost half way to the Merv oasis. It was these reconnoitings of Kouropatkin that occasioned so much excitement at the time. The belief was general that Skobelev would occupy Merv.

It is almost unnecessary to state that he did not march to Merv; but it is well to disperse any doubts that may exist as to the reason he did not push on any further. It is generally supposed that a disinclination to displease England, and a desire to keep his promises, caused the Emperor to restrain the ardour of Skobelev. This is a mistake. By the terrific blow he struck the Akhal Tekkes at Geok Tepé, Skobelev shattered to pieces the Turcoman barrier Lord Salisbury had fondly believed would last his lifetime; but he was too mauled to reap the full advantage of it for the moment. He only had a striking force of 2,000 sickly men after he occupied Askabad, and having used up nearly all his ammunition during the siege, he was not in a condition to push on to an unknown oasis, and expose himself to a repetition of the hard knocks he had received at Geok Tepé.

So he returned home; but before he left Akhal an incident occurred which shows what a deep personal interest he took in the Central Asian Question. In spite of Russia's avowed intention of keeping the country she had won, and notwithstanding that the Turcoman barrier had been shattered, the English Government decided to evacuate Afghanistan. The ablest English writers on the Russo-Indian Question were averse to surrendering Candahar, but the Government persisted in its policy, and it received the warmest concurrence of the Marquis of Ripon.

Speaking at Leeds, on January 28, 1885, the Ex-Viceroy said: "We withdrew at a time which suited our purpose,

and which we believed to be to the advantage of the Afghan people; and as our troops marched away with steady steps from Candahar, no voice was lifted against us, and no dog barked at our heels."

Yet, as a matter of fact, a voice was lifted against us, and poisoned the motives of our departure. That voice was Skobeleff's. In an official account of Skobeleff's campaign, which General Grodekoff, the chief of his staff at Geok Tepé, has just published, the following passage occurs:—"To raise Russia's *préstitge* in Central Asia, and to depress that of England, General Skobeleff sent native agents into the bazaars of Central Asia, to spread throughout the region the report that it was the White Tsar who had compelled England to evacuate Afghanistan."

Such a revelation cannot be very pleasing to those who held at the time that we were conciliating Russia by evacuating Candahar. As a matter of fact, our retirement encouraged the Russians to advance. They thought we had had enough of Afghanistan, and would never enter the country any more. In an official Russian account of the war which I have in my possession, and which is to be found in every military library in Russia, the writer, General Soboleff, asserts that we retired because we were so repeatedly defeated by the Afghans, that the people of India were excited to a mutinous condition by our disasters. If our army had not fallen back in time, the whole of India would have risen against us!

It is the publication of such works as Soboleff's "Anglo-Afghan Conflict," and Skobeleff's plans for invading India, that has stimulated so strongly the desire of Russian military men to shatter our Eastern Empire.

Just before the evacuation of Candahar took place, a clever caricature was published in Russia, entitled "England and Russia in Central Asia." This represented two feet: one, English shod, stepping off a piece of ground marked "Afghan-

istan," and another, encased in a big Russian boot, advancing closely upon it, with the evident intention of administering a kick to the retiring party. I had several thousand copies of this caricature struck off, and distributed them to Parliament and the Press during the Candahar debate; but I did not imagine at the time—nor yet, I suppose, did anybody—that the Russian artist had so correctly represented in a sketch meant to be humorous, what Skobelev had actually done.

The brilliant and dashing general, having administered a parting kick at us, returned home, and Russia proceeded to organize her new possession. In the meanwhile O'Donovan made his famous dash to Merv, and during his five months' stay wrote those wonderful letters which will never perish so long as any record exists of British travel.

But Edmund O'Donovan did more than simply pen letters to the *Daily News*. He endeavoured to persuade the Turcomans to cease their attacks upon the Russians, and avoid giving them any offence. These efforts were, to a large extent, successful, and from the time he left the oasis until the Russians occupied it, the only outrage the Merv Tekkes perpetrated was the attack on the Parfenoff surveying party in 1882. This outrage, however, was due to some bad characters, and was so quickly and promptly disavowed by the tribe, that the Russians expressed themselves perfectly satisfied with the reparation made by the Mervis.

After O'Donovan had left the oasis, the Russian authorities decided they would thoroughly establish their influence there. Tekme Sardar, one of the two Tekke chiefs defending Geok Tepé, had already surrendered to them, and had been sent to St. Petersburg to be tamed by a sight of Russia. The second, Makdum Kuli, O'Donovan's friend, they tried to win over through their secret agents, but failed.

One of these secret agents was Fazil Beg, a Russianized Khivan. He used to go backwards and forwards between

Merv and Askabad, and encouraged all the Tekkes he could to visit the latter place to traffic at the bazaar the Russians had erected.

The Russians are well aware of the value of a bazaar as a means of exercising influence in the East. Directly they finished their fort at Askabad, they erected a bazaar there, and encouraged Armenians from Baku and Tiflis to establish shops in the place. Before long the Tekkes of Merv, attracted by the high prices the Russians gave for their supplies, began to appear at Askabad; at first, singly, and somewhat shy; afterwards in bands, when they found they were well treated.

In course of time the richer and more influential of the Mervis followed suit. As all arrivals at the bazaar were notified to the Russian authorities at once, they extended a warm hand to every Tekke who possessed any influence whatever at home, and in this manner created a pro-Russian party at Merv.

Herat is about as close to Merv as Merv is to Askabad. It is well to bear in mind that the moment the Russians occupied Merv they established a bazaar there, with thirty-two Armenian traders from Baku, and commenced applying to the tribesmen of the Murghab those tactics so successful at the capital of the Akhal Tekkes. But for the opportune arrival of Sir Peter Lumsden last autumn, there might have already been a pro-Russian party at Herat.

As soon as events had sufficiently matured, the authorities at Askabad decided to send an officer to Merv to obtain secretly a military survey of the oasis. Alikhanoff was the person chosen. To facilitate his operations a caravan was fitted out, commanded by an Armenian trader named Kosikh, representing in Central Asia the Moscow firm of Konshin and Co. Kosikh was already known at Merv to many Tekkes, who had transacted business with him in the Askabad bazaar.

Alikhanoff played the part of clerk to Kosikh the trader, and also acted as interpreter. It was a great advantage to him in his expedition that he spoke the language of the Turcomans quite fluently. To assist him in his survey a cornet of the Cossacks, Sokoloff, was appointed, and was also disguised as a caravan clerk.

To prevent any possibility of a failure of the enterprise, the Russians decided that they would not ask the permission of the Merv Tekkes to visit them, but would pounce upon them unawares. Alikhanoff, England knows to her cost, is an expert in effecting surprises, and his audacity was never better displayed than in his caravan journey to Merv.

Quitting Askabad early in February, 1882, the caravan, consisting of a few camels escorted by half a dozen well-armed Turcoman horsemen, set out for Merv *viâ* Kahka and the Tejend oasis. The distance by this route is 232 miles, and is divided into six marches. The distance from Merv to Herat is 240 miles.

Fazil Beg, the spy, went on to Merv beforehand to secure some guides for the expedition, and arrange with the pro-Russian party for the protection of the traders on their arrival. During the journey Alikhanoff made a thorough survey of the country, exploring parts unvisited by Mr. O'Donovan, and, entering Merv at night, encamped in the midst of the Tekkes, without anybody being aware of it except the chiefs in Russian pay.

The next morning, of course, there was a great hubbub at Merv. The people were not quite so staggered as when Mr. O'Donovan put in his sudden appearance among them, for many had become acquainted with the Russians in the interval; but they were more angry, and had not Alikhanoff possessed influential supporters among the chiefs, things would have fared badly with the caravan. At the very least, they would have been expelled at once from the oasis.

As usual, a meeting of the khans and elders was convened the moment the presence of the Russians became known, and the latter were summoned to appear before it. The meeting took place in a large *kibitha* or tent, to reach which the Russians had to pass through an "immense" crowd of sightseers "Entering the *kibitha*," says Alikhanoff,* "Kosikh, extending to every one his hands, which were shaken very unwillingly, sat down, as befits a rich Russian merchant, side by side with Makdum Kuli. I, as interpreter, sat on a felt at the entrance. The silence continued. Waiting some time for someone to speak, I decided to break it myself. I therefore commenced with something like the following harangue:—

"'From the letters you have received, you doubtless know the aim of our journey. My master, Severin Beg, is a rich Russian merchant. He enjoys the greatest respect of our authorities, and hence they instructed him to give their *salaam* to the people of Merv. Deciding to establish commercial intercourse with you, Severin Beg has come here to find out, on the spot, whether he can buy and sell in your market. The Russian Government fully sympathises with this action, since it anticipates from it mutual advantages so desirable for the friendly and peaceful relations of neighbours. Thus, the sole object of our journey here is trade, and we should like to know what your views are upon the point, and how you mean to regard it.'

"Another prolonged silence, broken at last by an old man, who said,—

"'Commerce is a good thing, but we fear to draw upon us the responsibility which will arise if any attack is made upon you by those bad men who exist among us, as everywhere. Go back to Askabad to negotiate with our delegates. Fix

* See narrative in "The Russians at Merv and Herat."

our relations, and when both peoples are united, trade as much as you like,' &c., of an equally evasive character.

"‘I tell you we are traders,’ I rejoined; ‘it is not our affair to join or disunite peoples. For that, apply to the Russian government; send it your envoys if you like. As regards us, there is nothing undetermined in our relations. The Russians are at peace with you. The Askabad bazaar is filled with traders from Merv. We did not see, therefore, any reason why we should not come here, and hence resolved to come. Give us a decided answer. Will you let us unpack and commence trade, or do you demand our return? But mind, I warn you beforehand that your action will be viewed in its proper light by General Röhrberg, if you close to Russians alone that route which is freely made use of by the rest of our neighbours, Bokharans, Khivans, Persians, and Afghans. Just think what your relations will be with a powerful neighbour, if the authorities at Askabad reply to your conduct by refusing to allow a single Mervi to put his foot on Russian soil? Who will be the loser then?’

"Again a profound silence, broken at last by a discussion of the chiefs as to whether delegates should be sent to Askabad or not.

"‘We don’t value the trade of Merv so much as all that, I said at last, ‘we are not disposed to waste our time running backwards and forwards. If we go back this time without selling our goods, you won’t see our faces any more. I should like to ask you to tell me whether you assemble and debate every time a caravan arrives, or only do this to the Russians?’

"‘No, we would not assemble thus,’ replied an elder. ‘If anybody were to fall upon the caravan of any other country, if they were to rob it before my eyes, I would not even wink. We are not afraid of them; but we don’t want anything to happen to you, the merchants of the great Padishah.’

“‘The people are ready to obey us,’ added Kara Kuli Khan ; ‘we have no doubts on that score. But there are not a few *kaltamans* in the oasis—robbers from whom we ourselves are not safe. They might fall on your packs, and on you yourselves.’

“‘If we do not meet with any hostility on the part of the people,’ I replied, ‘we will answer for the rest. Our arms and our escort will keep the robbers in order.’

“‘Again a profound silence. Makdum Kuli exchanged significant glances with his neighbours.’

“‘I have said all I have to say,’ I continued ; ‘we will now await your answer. If it be the same as before, we shall prepare for the journey back to Askabad.’

“I felt sure that the previous answer would not be repeated.

“After another discussion Makdum Kuli said :—‘Tell the trader, that we are only influenced by fears for his safety, otherwise, we have nothing against him, and he may stop here for ever if he likes.’

“‘God forbid!’ I replied. ‘It will be quite enough to stop here two or three market days to see what your trade is.’

“‘In that case, here is our answer,’ said Makdum Kuli. ‘Let him remain here two or three market days, and afterwards return to Askabad with the delegates.’”

This was agreed upon, and the assembly broke up. Ali-khanoff’s account of the discussion throws a clear light upon his adroitness in managing Asiatics. He thoroughly understands their ways.

The Russians stayed a fortnight at Merv, during which Alikhanoff made as many friends as he could, and intrigued against those who were disposed to interfere with the accomplishment of his great aim. Disguised afresh as a Tekke, he availed himself of every opportunity to explore the oasis, and by stealing out at early dawn secured unobserved a survey of the fortress of Merv.

He himself was quite at home among the Tekkes, but Kosikh grew nervous after hearing that some of the people had been plotting against his life, and hastened the departure of the caravan. Alikhanoff took advantage of the return journey to survey another route between Askabad and Merv.

Shortly afterwards, a second Russian officer, a Mussulman named Nasirbegoff, who had accompanied Stolietoff to Cabul as topographer, was sent to Merv in disguise, and pushed on thence to the Oxus. By this time the Tekkes had lost so much of their hostility to the Russians, that it was felt that an agent might be sent there openly. Lessar was selected for this mission, and passed through Merv to Khiva without exciting any animosity. In this manner Russia secured within a twelvemonth a survey of all the roads converging from the Turkestan and Transcaspian bases upon Merv, and dispelled the disinclination of the people to receive Russian visitors.

Another success followed upon this. Alikhanoff, who had maintained close relations with Makdum Kuli, persuaded that chief to throw in his lot with Russia, and proceed to Moscow to witness the Tsar's coronation. His submission was considered a great gain for Russia. He had been the soul of the defence of Geok Tepé, and the authorities at Askabad had always feared that he might repeat that terrible resistance at Merv. His departure from the oasis left the people without a leader, and henceforward the Russians felt that they could afford to play a bolder game.

I saw Makdum Kuli several times at the Tsar's coronation. He lodged with other Asiatics at an hotel opposite the rooms assigned me by the Russian Government. The splendour of the Kremlin festivities thoroughly tamed him, and when he returned with the rest of the Turcomans to Askabad he was as little disposed to fight Russia any more as Cetewayo after his trip to London.

Knowing how great his personal influence at Merv had been, Alikhanoff induced him to pay a visit there on his arrival, to describe to his fellow countrymen what the glories of Russia were like. His descriptions of the sights he had seen at Moscow exercised a most depressing effect upon the anti-Russian party, while at the same time the handsome Russian uniform he wore, and the account he gave of the favours conferred upon him by the Emperor, provoked a desire among other chiefs to make the acquaintance of such generous masters.

CHAPTER II.

THE SWOOP UPON MERV.

Russia, angry at our continued occupation of Egypt, resolves to seize the gates of Herat—Secret concentration of troops at points commanding Merv—Colonel Muratoff goes to the Tejend oasis "to return," but remains—Sudden appearance of Lieutenant Alikhanoff at Merv—The intrigues resulting in the acceptance of the suzerainty of Russia—Russia promises to place only one officer in the oasis—Sudden advance of the Tejend force behind the Askabad deputation of chiefs—The Merv Tekkes hurriedly resist, but are defeated, and the Russians enter the fortress—Alikhanoff made governor of Merv.

JUST then the Egyptian question was exciting a good deal of attention. Our active interference in Soudan affairs had not yet begun, and during the lull preceding it, a general European discussion was prevailing as to whether England should or should not evacuate Egypt. Russia had never concealed her opposition to our being there at all, and she therefore threw herself vigorously into the controversy.

To understand her feelings properly, we must endeavour to examine things a little from her standpoint. Russia makes no secret that she is determined some day to have Constantinople. Her longing for the Bosphorus is as great now as it ever was in her career. The most resolute opponent to her aims is England. Austria and Germany she believes may be "squared"; but up to now it has been impossible to buy off England. Still, Russia has always nourished a hope that when matters reached a decisive stage, our acquiescence might be purchased by allowing, or assisting us to annex Egypt. Cairo was the price to be paid for Constantinople.

I have no space to go fully into the details of this policy; but I have said enough to indicate that Russian

statesmen could not be pleased at our occupying Egypt and offering them no compensation. We appropriated the power of Egypt; we assumed control over the Suez Canal; and still we as fiercely as ever refused to allow Russia to advance upon Constantinople.

I shall be told that Russia had no right to be angry at our occupation of Egypt, since we had no intention of annexing the country. In reply, I must ask that matters be again looked at from the Russian standpoint. Russian policy is dictated by the impressions and the feelings of Russian statesmen, not by the impressions of Englishmen. The general impression in Russia at the time was, that England had virtually annexed Egypt, and that the fluctuations and contortions of Mr. Gladstone's policy masked a cut and dried plan for permanently retaining the country.

Anybody who has lived in the military states of Europe can easily understand how such an impression should have arisen. The statesman of Russia, Germany, Austria, and France usually formulate a policy long in advance of current events, and resolutely apply themselves to deliberately working it out. English statesmen, on the other hand, mostly live from hand to mouth. The occupation of Egypt was the result of no deep "design," using the term in the Continental sense. England floundered into the Egyptian embroglio, and yet the errors of her statesmen did more to root her influence and authority in the country than the cleverest scheming could have done. Now, men who make events are apt to think that others make them also. Russia, at first disposed to treat Mr. Gladstone's disinterested policy as generously as that statesman's Liberal supporters, observed after a while that England benefited, in her view, so largely by his blunders, that she began to ascribe them to a deep and clever plan.

When England first sent troops to Egypt there were three great obstacles to a prolonged or permanent occupation of the

country. In the first place, the English public generally were averse to it; in the second, the Egyptian people, it was thought, would never tolerate a foreign ruler; in the third, most politicians held that all the Great Powers would oppose a long stay.

The first two obstacles had practically disappeared by the autumn of 1883. After the collapse of Arabi Pasha's army, the whole of Egypt proper submitted without a struggle to English authority. Excluding the Soudan, the country proved amazingly easy to rule. The people, in short, appeared to be so utterly unable to do without their new masters, that England began to look upon herself as marked out by Providence to control the country.

Of course she only meant to control it for a time, but to Russia, who had opposed any occupation at all, it was as obnoxious that she should remain in Egypt three, five, or fifteen years, as for ever. What England considered a troublesome burden, Russia regarded as a splendid acquisition—a grand dependency possessing all the elements of a second India. Our continued occupation, therefore, displeased her. Finding we were indisposed to evacuate the country at once, she decided she would establish a counterpoise in the East. She resolved to reopen the Central Asia Question.

The Emperor was perfectly aware that Merv was no counterbalance to Cairo, or Sarakhs to Alexandria; but what he had in view was the creation of a new base, that would enable him to reopen in turn the Eastern Question on advantageous terms. Merv, if a "mere collection of mud huts," as the Duke of Argyll expressed it, was the stepping stone to Herat, and at Herat he would be able to put the screw on England, if her policy in Egypt continued to displease him.

I have been at pains to describe the influence the Egyptian Question had on the occupation of Merv, because, if it be clearly appreciated, the subsequent movement to the gates of

Herat will be found to contain a larger amount of menace than is commonly imagined. The swoop upon Merv was no haphazard event. No local reason whatever provoked it. Russia was not forced to occupy Merv by any circumstance on the spot compelling her, against her wish, to violate her numerous assurances to this country. I believe that I am acquainted with everything that has been published in Russia—official and non-official—bearing upon the occupation of Merv. This published literature does not contain a single charge against the people of Merv, in excuse for the annexation.

Therefore, all that has been written in England by writers ignorant of the course of events in Russia, extenuating the annexation on the grounds of the difficulty of keeping the Merv Tekkes in order except by annexation, is theoretical nonsense. The Merv Tekkes were in excellent order at the time, so far as Russia was concerned. They had committed no outrages on Russia, and were committing none. It was as safe for Russian caravans to journey from Askabad to Khiva, across a desert which, anterior to the previous campaign, had been a prey to disorder, as to journey from Tashkent to Samarcand, or Tiflis to Baku. The Merv Tekkes scrupulously avoided attacking Russian subjects, and it was a matter of common notoriety that these man-stealers of the Asiatic steppes, finding their occupation as such gone, were becoming quiet, hard-working, industrious peasants.

It is true that there were small forays now and again against the Persians of the Atak oasis, a district stretching from the Russian frontier to Sarakhs; but they were a mere bagatelle compared with the great plundering expeditions the Tekkes twenty years previous had led in different directions, and for these forays Russia herself was indirectly responsible.

The Atak oasis was an integral part of Persia. The Shah's right to it was never questioned until Russia occupied Askabad. The Alieli and other Turcomans paid tribute regularly

to the Shah's representatives, and appealed to them for help when they quarrelled with the Tekkes of Merv. If that help was not always forthcoming, it did not demonstrate that the Atak was not part of Persia, for the people of the oasis were as much given to forays as the Tekkes, and, as often as not, were themselves the offenders.

To put an end to this condition of things, Persia prepared, after the occupation of Askabad, to exercise more stringent authority over the people of the Atak. The Shah felt that, if he only kept them in order, and prevented them perpetrating small raids upon Merv, the people of Merv in turn, having no provocation for their forays, would suspend their outrages. The Persian authorities admitted that their Atak subjects provoked the raids, and one has only to refer to O'Donovan's book to see how exasperating they could be towards their Merv neighbours across the desert.

But I wish it to be clearly understood that, after all, these raids were very rare subsequent to the occupation of Askabad—say half-a-dozen times in the course of a year, and that only a few individuals participated in them. The Persian border from Askabad to Sarakhs was incomparably quieter than it had been in O'Donovan's time, and had the Shah's troops occupied two or three points in the oasis, the last vestiges of border turbulence would have disappeared. Russia allowed the troops to almost reach the district, and then delivered a sort of ultimatum, forbidding them to enter it.

The English Government protested strongly against this. It demonstrated clearly enough the Shah's claim to the territory. It showed how great would be the benefit to the people of the Atak and Merv if the frontier were properly administered. Russia refused to listen to any arguments. She would not occupy the district herself, and she would not allow Persia to do it. She kept open this tiny sore on the

Persian frontier, in order that if ever she wanted a pretext for occupying Merv one would be immediately forthcoming.*

Of course this was not the sole reason ; there was another and greater one. The easy road from Askabad to Herat, *via* Old Sarakhs, runs through this Atak oasis. Had Russia let Persia assume definite control over it, the advance upon India would have been blocked. Russia could have only advanced with the permission of the Shah, or by violating his territory. This circumstance gave an importance to the Atak oasis out of all proportion to its intrinsic worth. It was, from the Russian standpoint, absolutely essential to Russia.

From what I have said, which, in common with the greater part of this book, is based on Russian information, it will be seen that there was no serious tribal turbulence on the Russo-Turcoman frontier at the time the swoop was made upon Merv ; and that, as regards the Persian border, the old raids had dwindled down to petty pilferings, which could have been suppressed at any moment if the Emperor had allowed the Shah to keep his subjects under better control.

So insignificant were these pilferings, that Russia has never attempted to cite them as an excuse for the occupation of Merv. It is only a few English writers who have put forward the plea, and they have done so because they were ignorant of the true state of affairs on the Russo-Turcoman frontier in the autumn of 1883.

To me it has always appeared ridiculous, as well as unpatriotic, for Englishmen to invent pleas for Russia's aggressiveness, based on mere theory, which Russia herself does not take the trouble, or is unable to put forward, in extenuation of her advances towards India. Tribal turbulence provoked the conquest of Geok Tepé, and Russia's contention on this score

* The negotiations on the question of the Atak oasis will be found in Blue Book, Central Asia, No. 1, 1884.

I have always defended. But tribal turbulence did not provoke the occupation of Merv, and those who fancy it did should just remember that Russia herself has never sought justification on this ground.

Nor is the plea that Alikhanoff and Komaroff acted on their own responsibility any sounder. Russia herself has never advanced this excuse. It is only English writers who have done so, and done so without the slightest basis for their erroneous assertion. This I can prove at a stroke.

In the spring of 1883 the garrison of Khiva, located at Fort Petro-Alexandrovsk, consisted of the 4th Regiment of Orenburg Cossacks, the 5th and 13th Turkestan line battalions, and the 6th battery of artillery. This was the strength of the garrison according to the official report published in Russia early in the year, and it tallied, I have good grounds for believing, with the list in the possession of the military authorities at Simla, derived from non-Russian sources. In the autumn of 1883 the garrison was increased by the arrival of the 17th Turkestan line battalion from Samarcand.

I only knew of this last year, after the occupation of Merv was an accomplished fact. Every day I receive from Russia the principal newspapers, including those of the Caucasus and Turkestan; and one morning, glancing through the *Moscow Gazette*, I saw that among the sufferers from a flood near Fort Petro-Alexandrovsk were the men of the 17th Line Battalion. Now this battalion belonged to the garrison of Samarcand, distant at least a month from Khiva, by the quickest possible means of conveyance—how, therefore, had it come to be shifted to the latter place, and for what reason?

This was explained in an equally casual manner a short time afterwards. Writing from Fort Petro-Alexandrovsk to the same paper, a correspondent, signing himself Gospodin Tehursin, mentioned, among other things, the suicide of

Lieutenant Bodisco, of this same 17th battalion, "who had been in a state of deep melancholy from the time six months previous, when the battalion had been sent from Samarcand to Khiva to be despatched to Merv, and who had preferred blowing out his brains to accompanying it any further."

This 17th battalion, therefore, was sent to Khiva from Samarcand *in the autumn of 1883*, to take part in the occupation of Merv. As soon as Alikhanoff induced the Merv Tekkes to submit, it marched from Khiva to Merv, *via* Tchardjui, on the Oxus, and now forms part of the regular garrison of the place. Bodisco, who was home-sick, refused to accompany it any further, and committed suicide. The demonstration is clear, consequently, that Alikhanoff's swoop upon Merv was not a filibustering exploit, carried out by him and other frontier officials on their own personal responsibility. Alikhanoff and Komaroff were under the control of the Governor-General of the Caucasus, Prince Dondukoff-Korsakoff. The 17th Line battalion, on the other hand, was under the control of General Tchernayeff, the Governor-General of Turkestan. The two administrations are as widely distinct as the governments of India and Canada. To secure the simultaneous action of the two administrations in support of a common movement, the impulse must proceed from St. Petersburg. As a matter of fact, the 17th battalion was marched to Khiva by the order of the Minister of War, and, to cut unnecessary argument short, the whole of the operations culminating in the occupation of Merv were directed by the authorities at the Russian capital.

It is well to bear in mind that although this stealthy movement of troops in Turkestan was not known to the public of this country, the military authorities in India were cognisant of it. Through the Hindoo traders arriving from Turkestan and other sources, the Intelligence Branch was placed in possession of information, difficult to disbelieve,

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that the Russians were moving towards the Afghan and Turcoman territories. The military authorities appealed to the Marquis of Ripon to take timely precautions against this movement, but their warnings were pooh-poohed and their counsels disregarded.

While the Turkestan authorities were concentrating troops at Khiva to take part in the occupation of Merv, the officials of the Caucasus were not idle.

In October our Minister telegraphed from Teheran that the Governor of Askabad, General Komaroff, had sent a force to the Tejend, and established a fort there. The Tejend may be roughly described as the midway oasis between Askabad and Merv. It is there that the Hari Rud or Tejend, the river watering Herat and Sarakhs, buries itself in the Turcoman sands. Although larger than the Merv oasis, it was practically unoccupied until after the fall of Geok Tepé. The Persians would not let the Mervis settle there, and the Mervis would not let the Persians. After Skobeleff took Geok Tepé General Kouropatkin pushed on to the place, and found there several thousand fugitives. These submitted, and either returned home or settled down along the Tejend river, Russia promising to protect them from the Persians. As the Tejend oasis was a no man's land before then, their submission conferred upon Russia, in her opinion, a sort of right to the country.

From Askabad to the Tejend oasis is about 120 or 130 miles, the road running first along the Russian oasis of Akhal and Persian oasis of Atak to Kahka, a large Atak settlement about 80 miles from Askabad, and then turning off at right angles across the plain to the Tejend, 50 miles to the north. Readers of O'Donovan's book will remember that the dashing Irishman made a halt on the banks of the Tejend. He quitted the Persian frontier at Mehne, 53 miles to the east of Kahka, and traversed the 50 miles to the Tejend in a night. From

the Tejend to Merv the 80 or 90 miles' distance is usually done by the Turcomans in a day or a day and a half.

After things had settled down in Central Asia, subsequent to the English evacuation of Afghanistan and the Russian annexation of Askabad, a small Cossack force was periodically sent to the Tejend. The excuse for this movement was, that the new settlers there were Russian subjects, and that Russia required a proper topographical knowledge of the oasis.

At first the Merv Tekkes were extremely alarmed at the approach of the Cossacks so close to their country, and assembled in thousands to bar the way across the plain to the Merv oasis. But when, time after time, the Cossacks returned without advancing beyond the Tejend, they grew less suspicious. They were gradually lulled into a false security. In this manner when, at length, the Russians sent a larger force than usual to the Tejend, in the autumn of 1883, the Merv Tekkes went about their ordinary occupations, and made no preparations for defence. They had at Merv a fortress far larger and stronger than the one at Geok Tepé Skobeleff had nearly broken his army to pieces in battling his way into, and, what was more, they had cannon; but, not imagining that the Russians had any immediate designs on the oasis, they undertook no measures of defence.

It is well to bear these facts in mind, because Russia is endeavouring to secure in the Badgheis district of Afghanistan a pouncing position similar to the one on the Tejend. Ak Robot is even closer to Herat than Kari Bent, on the Tejend, is to Merv. Russia, in 1883, lulled the Mervis until she had got them completely off their guard, and then she pounced upon their stronghold, regardless of all her assurances to England. In the same manner, if we let her retain the gates of Herat, she will wait until a favourable moment occurs, and then the key of India will be carried by a sudden *coup de main*.

The military movement in the direction of the Tejend did

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not escape notice in England. A discussion arose as to whether the expedition to the Tejend did not constitute a violation of Russia's assurance not to advance beyond the limits of the last annexation. Thereupon the *Journal de St. Petersbourg*, which must surely have told more fibs in its time than any existing newspaper, published an indignant denial of the reports in circulation. The movement of troops to the Tejend was not an "expedition"; it was simply a "reconnaissance." It drew a fine distinction between the two expressions. An "expedition," said the organ of the Russian Foreign Office, "always goes and stops, but a reconnaissance always returns!"

Considering that Russia had already mapped every inch of the Tejend region, and knew through the explorations of Alikhanoff, Lessar, Nasirbegoff, and others, the whole of the surrounding country, the necessity for even a "reconnaissance" was not very apparent; above all, a reconnaissance by a force, which, according to our Minister at Teheran, comprised 1,000 infantry, 500 cavalry, and 10 guns.

Our ambassador at St. Petersburg, Sir Edward Thornton, was thereupon instructed to make enquiries at the Russian Foreign Office. In reply he wrote: "His Excellency, M. Vlangaly, said that he was *not aware* of any force having been sent in that direction,* but he was not surprised at learning it. He said that on the occasion of the raid which had been made about two months ago into Persian territory by Turcoman raiders, when they carried off a number of cattle, &c., and, as he believed, some men, the Persian

* The conversation took place Jan. 2nd, 1884. Yet the organ of the Foreign Office had said, Nov. 10th, 1883: "Il y eu en effet une reconnaissance faite sur le Tejend (there has been, in fact, a reconnaissance made on the Tejend)," so that he could not have been totally unaware of it. However, his memory brightened up when Sir Edward gave him to understand that we knew what was going on, although he refused to impart any information, or admit more than was squeezed out of him by our ambassador.

Government had appealed to the Imperial Government to use their influence for the recovery of their cattle, &c., which had been taken. Instructions had consequently been sent to the commander of the forces at Askabad to do his best to meet the wishes of the Persian Government. M. Vlangaly supposed that it had been impossible to do so without the use of force, and that a small detachment had consequently been despatched for that purpose; but his Excellency doubted whether it could be nearly so large as I had mentioned, nor could he answer my inquiry as to the particular direction which the force in question would take."

It must not be supposed that this raid was a very large one, simply because the Shah had appealed to Russia for redress, or that the Shah could not have himself secured reparation if he had applied direct to the Merv Tekkes. The simple fact is, that Russia had not only prevented the Shah from administering the Atak frontier, but had also severed the close relations previously existing between Merv and Teheran.

As is well known to readers of Oriental history, Merv was once a dependency of Persia. After the Russian movement towards India commenced from the Caspian, British diplomacy for years did its utmost to get the Shah to establish a Persian protectorate over Merv, and the Merv Tekkes to acknowledge it. It was a very foolish policy, because, to put the matter briefly and forcibly, English statesmen tried to place the desert lion under the control of the Persian jack-ass. A far more sensible plan was that suggested by Colonel Valentine Baker when he visited the Perso-Turcoman frontier in 1873. This was, to place the Mervis under the Afghans.

Readers of Vambéry's delightful "Travels in Central Asia" cannot have forgotten the amazing instances he gives of Persian cowardice. A dozen or more Persians, attacked by two or three Turcomans, would not only throw down their

arms and beg for mercy, but also ask for the cords and bind each other prisoners, without making the slightest attempt at resistance. The Afghans, on the contrary, were quite a different people to deal with. The Merv Tekks always admitted that they were braver men than themselves.

The notion of passing under the rule of the Ameer was therefore not distasteful to them. After Valentine Baker's return, the Government sent on a special mission to the Perso-Turcoman frontier Major Napier, son of Lord Napier of Magdala. This was what he reported home.

"The occupation of Merv by an aggressive power will open the way to further extensions of influence on what has always been the weak side of Afghanistan, the side of Herat. As to the reasons underlying the evident desire of the Tekkes for an Afghan alliance, there is a very general impression abroad that an alliance with Afghanistan—the Afghans are their co-religionists—means an alliance with England. I received " (from the various Tekke chiefs he saw) "abundant proof of their desire for a direct connection with us, and I believe that they might be turned into a peaceful, honest, and prosperous community, and would prove a real strength to the border and to the empire."

Not long afterwards General Sir Charles MacGregor paid a visit to Sarakhs and Herat, and also advocated the enclosure of Merv within the political limits of Afghanistan; but his words fell flat on the ears of the authorities. England persisted in weaving her ropes of sand for binding Merv to Persia, and only left off when Russia sharply declared after the annexation of Askabad that she would not tolerate any more efforts on the part of the Shah to establish his influence there.

An intimation, in effect, was conveyed to Persia that if she wished to carry on diplomatic intercourse with Merv, it must be done through the medium of the Askabad authorities. Previously the Shah and the Mervis had settled their quarrels

themselves, by the short and summary process of retaliation one against the other, varied by occasional truces, during which they exchanged prisoners and hostages. The Shah had now to appeal to Komaroff. In this manner, Russia secured for herself a pretext for meddling with the affairs of Merv. If the Mervis failed to raid against Russia, the latter could always harass them by bringing them to book for their raids on Persia—raids, be it remembered, largely occasioned because Russia would not allow the Shah to put his frontier districts in order, and keep his own subjects from raiding against Merv.

Now this particular raid mentioned by Vlangaly having occurred, and Persia having appealed to Komaroff for redress, all that the latter needed to do was, to send a message to Merv, when reparation would have been at once forthcoming. The attack the previous year on the Parfenoff surveying party was a far grosser outrage; yet the tribe disavowed it at once, on receipt of Russia's demand for the offenders. In the interval Russia's influence had become immensely more powerful at Merv. This is avowed by Lessar and others. But Russia needed a pretext, and this not to justify herself in the eyes of the Tekkes, but to blind England as to her intentions on the Tejend. She did not wish her projected *coup de main* to be frustrated by the action of England.

On the spot, Russia did not trouble herself about the pretext at all. When the force proceeded to the Tejend, no ultimatum was sent to Merv, nor was any attempt made to settle the matter promptly. As a matter of fact, the sufferers had already done that themselves. They had seized some camels belonging to the Mervis, and squared their own loss by inflicting another on their neighbours.

Undeterred by England, therefore, Russia was able to consolidate her position on the Tejend, and await events. By the end of the year everything was ready for the swoop. All that

was now needed was some complication that would divert England's gaze, and minimize the force of her indignation, on finding the annexation of Merv an accomplished fact.

The occasion was found early in 1884. The long pent storm in the Soudan had burst, and the Government were seriously embarrassed. Baker Pasha had just gone to the East Soudan to relieve Sinkat, and General Gordon was on the point of starting for Khartoum. The belief was general that our troubles were only just commencing in the Soudan, and in no country was this impression stronger than in Russia.

Events, consequently, were ripe for the swoop. The decisive moment, for which the Russian Government had deliberately prepared by assembling forces on the Turkestan and Transcaspian sides of Merv, had at length arrived. The signal was given for delivering the blow.

Acting on the orders transmitted to him by General Komaroff, Alikhanoff started off for Merv, accompanied by a few horsemen and the hero of Geok Tepé, Makdum Kuli Khan. Arrived there, he put up for the night at the tent of Yousouf Khan, one of the four chiefs of Merv, and brother to Makdum Kuli. Yousouf, like many of the leading men, had already been bought over to Russia.

The next morning a public meeting was convened, and Alikhanoff read out to the people Komaroff's ultimatum. Immediate submission was demanded, and, to enforce his threats, Alikhanoff pointed to the Tejend and announced the force established there to be simply the vanguard of a greater army, then advancing towards the oasis.

That the submission was not a purely voluntary one, is proved by the following passage occurring in the Russian *Graphic* (*Vsemirnaya Illustratsia*), from the pen of Gospodin Krijanovsky, a Russian officer of Askabad, who sent that paper a sketch showing the submission of the Merv



MAJOR ALIKHANOFF.



chiefs in General Komaroff's drawing-room. He says:—"General Komaroff, wishing to take advantage of the impression which had been produced on the Tekkes by the despatch of a detachment of our troops to the Tejend, ordered Lieutenant Alikhanoff and Major Makdum Kuli Khan to proceed to Merv, and invite the Mervis to beg for mercy and become Russian subjects." The *Svet*, which is edited by the brother of Komaroff, supports this by its disclosure of the threats which Alikhanoff used with reference to the Tejend column being the vanguard of an advancing army.

Having already created a strong pro-Russian party by his intrigues, Alikhanoff experienced very little difficulty in persuading the people to accept the suzerainty of Russia. His arguments were no doubt strongly backed by the renegade, Makdum Kuli, who was probably compelled to dilate on the glories of Moscow, where, among other things, he had witnessed, within a few paces of Lord Wolseley, the feeding of half a million people and the review of 100,000 troops.

According to reports prevalent in Russia, Alikhanoff secured acquiescence all the more readily by wrapping up his terms in tissue paper. He repudiated any intention of occupying the country with a large garrison. All that Russia would do if they submitted would be, to send a governor with two or three assistants, and things would go on the same as before.

England was treated in a similar fashion. When M. de Giers officially informed our Ambassador of the submission of Merv, Feb. 15, he intimated that, in accepting it, the Emperor would simply send "an officer" to administer the government of that region. He added that "this officer would perhaps be accompanied by an escort of Turcomans!"

The solitary Russian officer proved to be as expansive as the famous four and a-half battalions sent to Khiva a decade earlier. "To give an idea of the Khivan Expedition," said

Count Schouvaloff to Earl Granville, January 8th, 1873, "it was sufficient to say that it would consist of four and a-half battalions." In reality Russia sent to Khiva 53 companies of infantry, 25 sotnyas of Cossacks, 54 guns, 6 mortars, 2 mitrailleuses, 5 rocket divisions, and 19,200 camels, with a complement of about 14,000 men.

At the bidding of Alikhanoff, the principal chiefs and elders signed a parchment deed he had brought with him, and selected a deputation to proceed to Askabad. On the way the party was joined by Colonel Muratoff, the commander of the Tejend force, and arrived at Askabad on the 6th February, two days after the annihilation of Baker Pasha's army at Tokar. The next morning, at 11 o'clock, the four chiefs and twenty-four notables took the oath of allegiance to the White Tsar in General Komaroff's drawing-room.

When the ceremony was over, Komaroff made a short speech to them, in which he declared that now they had made their submission to Russia, they would find the White Tsar a valiant protector of their interests. "To prove this to you," he said, "I telegraphed this morning to Teheran, demanding that the Persians should give up to you the hundred camels they took the other day, and I have just received a message from the Shah acceding to my request."*

Not a word was said about the cattle taken from the Persians, which had served Russia as a diplomatic pretext for assembling Muratoff's force on the Tejend. That was conveniently consigned to oblivion.

Russia, in a word, having made use of a Persian grievance to steal the independence of Merv, rounded on the Shah the moment the theft was accomplished, and treated him in turn as a delinquent. One can easily understand the Mervis exclaiming, "How great a ruler is this Russian general! He

* Krivanovsky's narrative.

has only got to send a message to the Shah, and the sovereign of Persia submits at once to his dictation ! ”

Several days were spent in feasting, and then came the *dénouement*. General Komaroff decided to proceed to Merv, and this was made the pretext for dispatching more troops—as a guard of honour!—to the Tejend. Arrived there, the whole available force was set in motion behind the returning deputation, and Fort Kari Bent being only three marches from Merv, the Russian army was already close to the oasis before its approach was known.

The elders were the first to arrive. They confirmed the reports that the Russian army was advancing, and asked the people to take out water to the troops. A tumult arose. A strong party, headed by Kajjar Khan, protested against the invasion, and threatened to kill anybody who obeyed the elders' request. They then applied themselves to the discussion of the best means of repelling the Russian advance.

The Merv oasis is not very large, and it is surrounded on all sides by barren plain or desert. Retreat from it was practically impossible. The Russians controlled three sides, and the Sariks—bitter enemies of the Tekkes—the fourth. To defend themselves against an invader the Tekkes had built an immense clay-ramparted enclosure, capable of accommodating the entire population with their herds and cattle. But there was no time to assemble the people inside it before the Russians arrived. The Mervis felt that they had no course open to them but to surrender.

The reports current in Russia that Alikhanoff tricked the people into submission by promising that no garrison should be installed, are strongly supported by this tumult. If the army had been expected, the so-called “anti-Russian party” would have organized resistance and made a stand somewhere. As it was, nothing whatever was done, and when the intelligence arrived that the Russians were already close

at hand, the only thing the Mervis could do was to go out on horseback, and fire a few ineffectual shots into the column by way of a protest.

While the excitement was still prevailing, Alikhanoff entered the oasis with a *sotnya* of Cossacks and endeavoured to allay it. The attitude of the people, however, was so defiant that he thought it prudent to take the advice of his Merv friends and fall back upon the Russian army, then camping for the night twelve miles distant from Merv.*

After dark Kajjar Khan, with several thousand horsemen, made an onslaught on the Russian camp, but was repelled with heavy loss. The next morning (March 16) the Russians marched early and occupied the fortress without serious resistance. Lessar says that altogether there were three fights or "skirmishes." The Russian loss, he adds, was "one man." Kajjar Khan fled to Afghanistan.

The fortress was far too large to afford security to the Russian force. General Komaroff, therefore, impressed several thousand Mervis at once, and compelled them to build, under the supervision of his officers, a regular fort on the European principle. The completion of this sealed the fate of Merv.

In reward for his successful swoop Alikhanoff received back the rank of major, and all his decorations; he was also made Governor of Merv. Makdum Kuli was rewarded by being appointed head of the Tejend oasis. Komaroff received the Order of the White Eagle, his district was raised to the rank of a province equal to that of Turkestan, and he himself was made governor-general.

To further add to his importance, he was assigned permission to carry on diplomatic intercourse direct with the neigh-

* Some of these particulars are taken from the narrative of a Turcoman eyewitness, published in an Indian paper. They curiously tally with Russian reports.

bouring states of Persia and Afghanistan. In other words, if he wished to intrigue with the Ameer without resorting to the instrumentality of the Foreign Office at St. Petersburg, he was at liberty to do so. Lessar was appointed his diplomatic agent for this purpose.

The news of the occupation of Merv excited a storm of indignation in England. At first, the artful manner in which the Russian Government represented the annexation as a "voluntary submission" provoked a few excuses. It was said that as the people of Merv themselves had asked to become Russian subjects the Emperor was, to a certain extent, justified in relieving himself of the burden of his assurances to England. "After all," it was a happy ending to the Turcoman question, and Russia, having got Merv and rounded off her frontier, would trouble us no more.

Before a week was over, however, Komaroff's brother had let the cat out of the bag. The editor of the *Svet*, himself a military officer, was so proud of the cleverness displayed by his brother in accomplishing the swoop, that he published an account of the operations on the Tejend, and the audacious threats of Alikhanoff that had brought about the submission of Merv.

From this account sprang the impression that Alikhanoff and Komaroff had acted as fillibusters, and forced the hands of their Government, but the facts I have given demonstrate this impression to be totally wrong. It is an impression which has never prevailed one moment in Russia. There is nothing in the *Svet* narrative to justify its existence, and the account I have given of the concentration of troops in Khiva disposes of the notion completely.

To be short and plain, Alikhanoff and Komaroff simply acted according to the instructions telegraphed to them to Askabad, and no more anticipated the desires, or forced the hand of their Government, than Lord Wolseley did when he invaded Egypt and conquered Arabi Pasha. If Alikhanoff's

diplomacy at Merv was shady, it was not a whit darker in hue than the diplomacy exercised by the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs at St. Petersburg.

The annexation of Merv was deliberately planned by the Russian Government, and carried out in strict accordance with its orders. The *coup de main* was totally unprovoked by the Tekkes; it was done in violation of a whole series of solemn assurances to England; and the blow was struck in a treacherous and cowardly manner, dishonourable to a nation that had produced such a hard-hitting, fair-fighting hero as Skobelev.

When Russia annexed Askabad, I defended her action against the whole English Press. When the excitement took place over the Atrek boundary convention with Persia in 1882, I issued a map to Parliament and the Press, based on the new treaty with the Shah, showing that Russia had done no evil. In my various writings on Central Asia I have always justified her policy when I thought it fair, and have never hesitated to condemn the policy of England when I considered it stupid or selfish.

I can fairly claim, therefore, that when I denounced the annexation of Merv, on the news becoming known in this country last year, I did so without any avowed animus as a Russophobe. I felt that the Emperor had broken his solemn promises, and the promises of Alexander II, without the slightest measure of justification. Nothing has been published in Russia since to shake this conviction, while the facts that have come to light have only strengthened what I believe to be a fair and impartial view of the transaction.

There had been two widely distinct and clearly opposed views of the Russian advance, among members of the House of Commons, up to the time of the annexation of Merv. The debate that took place, when the news became known, was the first that found the two sides united as to the necessity

for disregarding further assurances, and opposing a firm and unsevered front to Russian aggression.

According to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, this unanimity was, to a certain extent, due to a pamphlet I circulated in the House among all the members just before the debate began, giving an account of Merv and the results which I believed would inevitably spring from the annexation. In that pamphlet, which served as a handbook to the debate, I drew particular attention to the open character of the country lying between Merv and Herat, and I printed in large type this warning :—

“That the annexation of Merv, being inevitably attended with the incorporation of the Sarik Turcomans, will extend Russian rule up the Murghab to Penjdeh, at the foot of the Paropamisus, to within 140 miles of the Key of India, England, at the same time, being still posted at Quetta, 514 miles from Herat.”*

How I came to predict so correctly the second Russian advance, from Merv to the gates of Herat, can be best described in another chapter.

* Five hundred copies of the pamphlet, “The Russian Annexation of Merv,” with three maps, and a frontispiece illustrative of Merv, were struck off in twenty-four hours. There being no time to post them, they were distributed in the members’ lobby. “Soon after the House assembled, half the persons in the lobby might have been seen with the orange pamphlet in their hands. As the House filled, a demand arose for copies among the minor members who had not received them, and Mr. Marvin, who was in the lobby, dispatched a special messenger for a hundred more. In this manner, when the debate actually did come off, nearly everybody used it as a handbook, and there can be hardly a doubt that it secured a very important effect upon the speeches, observable in the unanimity with which the members of both parties insisted on the necessity of trusting Russia no more, and the imperative need of firm and decisive measures on the part of the Government. During the debate, Mr. Marvin sat under the gallery, watching the effect of his pamphlet.”—*Newcastle Chronicle*, February 28th, 1884. The pamphlet was translated into German ; and in India an eminent military officer, well known for his patriotic interest in the Central Asia Question, published, at his own cost, an edition at Bombay, and distributed copies throughout the Peninsula.

CHAPTER III.

THE ADVANCE TO THE GATES OF HERAT.

General Petrusevitch's secret survey of Afghanistan in 1878—His suggestion that Russia, after occupying Merv, should insert a wedge between Herat and Meshed—Concentration of troops at Merv—General Komaroff seizes Old Sarakhs—Alikhanoff's intrigues with the Sarik Turcomans—His attempt on Pendjeh—Lumsden finds the Russians advancing up the Hari Rud, and posted at Pul-i-Khatum—Russia delays the despatch of General Zelenoi in order to push further towards Herat—Occupation of the Zulfikar Pass, Ak Robat, and Pul-i-khisti.

WHEN, in the early part of 1881, exciting telegrams were arriving every day from Russia, describing Skobelev's terrible conflict with the Tekkes at Geok Tepé, it may be remembered that one of those messages recorded the death of a general, who fell in a night assault upon the fortress. The name of that general was Petrusevitch. So far as I am aware, he was the first to suggest the idea of thrusting the Turcoman wedge from Merv to the Parôpamisus mountains, and under cover of it securing the gates of Herat.

Petrusevitch was quite a different type of officer from Alikhanoff or Komaroff. Honest, truthful, averse to intrigue, and devoted to his duty, he was, in one word, a representative in actual life of that ideal of an Indian administrator, which is commonly held in this country. The district he governed in the Caucasus for many years was a model of good order, and he was so deeply respected by the hill tribes, although not a fighting man, that when he fell at Geok Tepé they sent a deputation to the scene of the conflict, to beg of Skobelev the body of the deceased general, to bury it in their midst.

Petrusevitch was first dispatched to the Transcaspian

region in 1874, and there is every reason to believe that he pushed his explorations into Afghanistan as far south of Herat as Seistan. In subsequent years he undertook other journeys along the Perso-Turcoman frontier, from the Caspian to Sarakhs, and in 1879, just before he received the appointment of Governor of Krasnovodsk, in succession to the defeated general, Lomakin, he penned an exhaustive report upon the Turcomans.

In this report he traced, in dealing with the Turcoman tribes of the Merv-Herat region, the Afghan and Persian frontiers in such a fashion as to leave open the gap which Russia has just occupied. Up to then it had been accepted both in England and Russia that the Afghan dominions extended from the Oxus to Sarakhs. Petrusevitch was the first to bulge back the frontier to the hills at the rear of Penjdeh, less than one hundred miles from Herat.

A copy of this report reached me from the Caucasus, and I made it the backbone of a work I was then preparing on the Turcomans. To me this hint or claim of Petrusevitch's seemed so ominous, that I drew a series of maps to illustrate the menace it conveyed to the security of Meshed and Herat.

Respecting his contention I said, in translating his words in full :—"Particular attention should be paid to this passage by political writers. The attempt to force a recognition of a 'no man's land' between Meshed and Herat is, in reality, nothing more than an effort to extend the Turcoman region wedge-fashion between Persia and Afghanistan. Russia, in occupying Merv, *will inevitably claim the right to extend her power along this wedge also.* The conquest of Akhal extends her rule to Gyaoors—the conquest of Merv will extend it to Penjdeh."*

* "Merv, the Queen of the World; and the Scourge of the Man-Stealing Turcomans." 450 pp., 11 maps. London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1881.

My work was published in 1881, and was purchased for the Government Departments in London and Simla. It cannot, therefore, be said that the Government were unaware as to the serious results that would inevitably attend an occupation of Merv. To prevent all possibility of Russia advancing her present claims to Penjdeh and other gates of Herat, I urged that the Afghan frontier from Sarakhs to the Oxus should be organized without delay, and the gap indicated by Petrusevitch closed up before the Russians occupied Merv.

"Do what we can," I wrote, "we can never prevent the inevitable junction of the Russian and English frontiers in Asia. It would be difficult to do so, even with Russia's help. It is impossible without it. . . . If we wait till Russia enters Merv and posts Cossacks on the Paropamisus ridge, we shall have to accept, at the dictation of Russia, *her* delimitation of the two Empires, with the dishonourable drawback of having to cede the best of the India-menacing points to her—as the Power in possession. Since the junction of the frontiers of the two Empires must some day take place; since we know that on the occasion of the next great war between the two Powers, Russia will attempt to strike at our Empire in India; since we have evidence beyond dispute that there exists an easy road of invasion—is it too much to demand of the rulers of our Empire that they arrange at once our border line in Central Asia? Is it too much to ask of thinking Englishmen that they shall individually do their utmost to preserve the Empire from the madness of masterly inactivity?"

These words were written four years ago, but they produced no effect upon the Government. The impression prevailed that a great mountain barrier, 10,000 or 15,000 feet high, intervened between Merv and Herat, and that even when the Russians secured the former they would fail to have easy access to the latter.

Yet our ablest authorities had done their utmost to disabuse the minds of English statesmen of this disastrous error. Colonel Valentine Baker, on his return from the Perso-Turcoman frontier in 1873, had pointed out the ease with which a military movement could take place from Merv to Herat, up the valley of the Murghab.

"Merv," he said, "with its water communication nearly complete, lies only 240 miles from Herat, to which place it is the key. There can be no doubt that Merv is the natural outwork of Herat, with the advantage of water supply all the way between the two cities. Strategically, the Russian occupation of Merv would be, so to say, the formation of a lodgment on the glacis of Herat. It would place Herat completely at her mercy."

General Sir Charles MacGregor, chief of Roberts's staff at Candahar, and since then Quartermaster-General of India, went closer to the Paropamisus ridge than Baker, penetrating in 1875 to within a few miles of Herat. What he wrote on his return was plain enough for any man to understand.

"A Russian authority, M. Tchichacheff," he observed in his *Khorassan*, "declares that Herat would be in no danger even if the Russians were in possession of Merv, because the road between these places lies over an impracticable range of mountains. I must, however, take leave to deny this statement in the most decided manner. I have been to the Herat valley, and have followed a considerable part of one of the roads to Merv, and I have made the most careful enquiries from people on the spot who were in the constant habit of riding over the rest of the distance. Yet there is so little impression of difficulty in my mind, that I would undertake to drive a mail coach from Merv to Herat by this road."

Still, English statesmen persisted in placing faith in great

mountain barriers between Merv and Herat, and the Duke of Argyll, pooh-poohing Valentine Baker and Macgregor, cracked an elephantine joke by telling the public not to be "Mervous" about the fate of "a few mud huts." The Russians were welcome to Merv: when they got there they would be as far off India as ever.

Much of the bad statesmanship of the time, as I have already said, must be ascribed to the confusion existing in the minds of English politicians, with regard to the double character of the Russian advance. There were two movements, from bases thousands of miles apart, running in the direction of India: one from Orenburg and Tashkent over a colossal range, 15,000 to 20,000 feet high; the other, from the Caspian over a plain and occasional hills. English politicians, Conservative as well as Liberal, mixed up one with another. Because the Turkestan line of advance was difficult, therefore the Caspian line of advance was more or less impracticable. One has only to read the Candahar debates to see how widespread this confusion was, and how little even talented Conservative politicians realised the real bearings of the new advance. Lord Salisbury was the only one who thoroughly grasped the facts of the situation.

The "Paropamisus bugbear" was finally disposed of in 1882, when Lessar explored the country from Sarakhs to Herat, and discovered the mountain range, 15,000 feet high, to be simply a ridge of hills, with passes only 900 feet above the surrounding locality. Across those passes, from Sarakhs to Herat, and from Merv to Herat, he found that a vehicle could be driven without the slightest difficulty. Practically, there was no barrier at all intervening between Herat and Merv.

Lessar's discovery provoked great attention on the part of experts in this country, but nothing was done by the Government to fill in the gap to which Petrusevitch had given

prominence.* The Marquis of Ripon, ignoring General Roberts's appeal that he should do so, gave the Ameer a subsidy and some arms, but this was all. No steps appear to have been taken to induce the Ameer to bulge out his Herati administration to the proportions indicated on English official maps, until after the occupation of Merv.

We thus see that the Government were well warned as to the danger the gates of Herat would run of being captured after the conquest of Merv, and upon the Marquis of Ripon and the Gladstone Cabinet must rest the blame of having refused to take any steps to protect them. From the time Petrusevitch gave England the hint of what Russia would do with the Turcoman wedge, up to the actual seizure of Merv, was a clear interval of three years. That precious period was allowed to pass away without the slightest effort to organize the Afghan frontier north of Herat.

Consequently, when Komaroff occupied Merv in force on the 16th of March, 1884, and turned his face towards Herat, the country lay practically open to him to the very walls of the Key of India.

It was the consciousness of this that rendered the annexation of such serious import to me. I knew that Petrusevitch's suggestion that Russia should advance from Merv to the gates of Herat had been borne well in mind by the Russian Government, and I was well aware that the Marquis of Ripon had done nothing to anticipate this movement. It was for this reason that, in issuing my new pamphlet, I printed in capital letters the warning that "The

* A full account of Lessar's explorations, together with Alikhanoff's narrative of his journey in disguise to Merv, was published in "The Russians at Merv and Herat" in the spring of 1883 by the writer. Most of the twenty-two illustrations accompanying it are from the talented pencil of Alikhanoff.

annexation of Merv, being inevitably attended with the incorporation of the Sarak Turcomans, will extend Russian rule to Pendjeh, or to within 140 miles of the Key of India."

The warning had but very slight effect upon the Government. Four or five months later the Ameer occupied Penjdeh, but—if the *Times* is to be believed—entirely on his own initiative. Considering the importance the Government suddenly attached to the gates of Herat after the Russians had occupied them, would it not have been more sensible to have forestalled the aggressors? There was no one to prevent the Afghans occupying Ak Robat, Zulfikar, and Pul-i-Khatun months and months before the advance from Merv took place; and, had the Government given the Russian menace adequate heed, they would have advised the Ameer to have done so instead of leaving him to act upon his own initiative.

To prevent England adopting a course of this kind, the Russian Government embarked upon a series of negotiations, which dawdled on through the summer and enabled it to consolidate its position at Merv.

As might be expected, when Komaroff occupied Merv in March, the feeling of the people for a time ran very strong against the Russians. The least impulse from without would have set the Turcomans in revolt. This was the proper period for the Ameer to have moved down the Hari Rud and Murghab to the limits assigned him on the Russian official maps—Sarakhs and Imam Bukash—and the question of delimitation could have been settled afterwards. Such a move could have been easily accomplished in a week or ten days. On neither river was there a man to oppose this advance, and it could have been effected without spilling a drop of blood or wasting a single rupee. Under the supervision of two or three English officers, the occupation of the Badgheis territory could have been carried out in such a



GENERAL ALEXANDER KOMAROFF.

RUSSIAN GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE TRANS-CASPIAN PROVINCE.

manner, that Russia would have been left without the slightest cause for just complaint.

The Turcomans of Merv would not have resented the approximation of the Afghans, and if Russia had sought to oppose the step, we could have responded to her threats by an intimation of the ease with which she could be turned out of the district she had just annexed, contrary to the feeling of the inhabitants.

But a manly and statesmanlike policy was hardly to be expected from a Cabinet, which by its vacillation had involved us in so many difficulties. In India it is an open secret that Sir Frederick Roberts, Sir Charles MacGregor, and other eminent generals, appealed in the strongest terms to the Marquis of Ripon to secure the gates of Herat before the Russians had time to advance from Merv. The Viceroy refused to take any action in the matter.

Thus the sore and hostile feeling of the Tekkes was allowed to die away, and Komaroff was left unchecked to consolidate his hold upon the newly-conquered country.

As soon as possible, the troops that had been concentrated in Khiva were dispatched to Merv. The Caucasus Regiment of Kuban Cossacks was also dispatched from the Caucasus to reinforce the garrison. In May Prince Dondukoff-Korsakoff the Governor-General of the Caucasus, himself set out to visit Merv. The prince travelled through Turkmenia in a calash, and it may be interesting to mention, that if, when he quitted Askabad, he had turned his course towards India instead of towards Merv, he could have travelled all the way in that same calash to the Chaman outposts of Quetta.

Advantage was taken of the presence of the prince to accept the submission of the Sarik Turcomans dwelling at Youletan. This place naturally belongs to the Merv oasis, and the annexation of the few thousand Sarik families dwelling there, consequently, was almost a matter of course.

The case was different with Old Sarakhs, which was formally annexed by General Komaroff immediately afterwards. Sarakhs, like Merv, had been dubbed by military men the key of Herat. To a force advancing from Turkestan to Herat Merv is the key; to a force advancing from the Caspian the key is Sarakhs. The two points are about 80 miles apart; Merv is 240 miles from Herat, and Sarakhs 202. Whatever may be the views of party politicians, the leading military men of England and Russia have long regarded Sarakhs and Merv as the two keys of Herat—the two points where troops could concentrate and rest before making their final advance upon the Key of India.

Russia, through her diplomatic organs, intimated her intention of annexing Old Sarakhs in advance of the actual occupation. The news excited interest second only to that provoked by the seizure of Merv. At this juncture, Lord Fitzmaurice exhibited a lamentable amount of flippant ignorance in replying to questions put to him in the House of Commons. First, he did not appear to know that there was such a place as Old Sarakhs, although it had been marked on Russian maps for years. Then, when the Foreign Office discovered the whereabouts of Old Sarakhs, the excuse was gratuitously put forward on behalf of Russia that the point annexed was of very little importance. It was only a heap of ruins!

What I said at the time, in contending with this view, will bear repetition now. "From* a strategical point of view, the one town is as good a base as another. To put the matter plainly, if London were Herat, and North and South Woolwich Old and New Sarakhs respectively, the menace to the City would be just as great from the Woolwich on the one side of the river as from the Woolwich on the other. The circumstance of Old Sarakhs having been the first site occu-

* *Morning Post* Leader, May 26, 1884.

pied in ancient times, would appear to indicate that it is the best spot in the locality for a town. New Sarakhs was simply erected on the west side of the river by the Persians (who besieged and destroyed Old Sarakhs fifty years ago), because the river formed a protection against the Turcomans of Merv. Hence, although the Russians are taking possession of a lot of ruins, they have presumably secured the best site for an administrative centre, where they will be able to draw away all the importance from the dirty, straggling Persian town lying across the water to the west."

The error current at the moment was the ascribing of the strategical significance of Sarakhs to the site of the actual town instead of to the locality generally. There is a danger that this may be repeated in the case of Herat also, and what I said in continuation may therefore be appropriately repeated:—

"Even had the Russians annexed the new town, they would have had to build their own cantonments, as at Tashkent; hence it is an altogether immaterial point whether they have got Old or New Sarakhs. They have secured all that they wanted, and all that English strategists sought to deprive them of—a lodgment in the Sarakhs district—and from this new base they will be only 202 miles, or five marches, distant from Herat. Of these two hundred and two miles, 130 are uninhabited; consequently, the Russians can roam over the plain to Kusan, 70 miles from Herat, without being checked by a single Persian, Turcoman, or Afghan. Lord Fitzmaurice seems to imagine that English diplomacy has done enough in preserving New Sarakhs from Russia, or, rather, that Russia has been considerate enough in taking the old site—for English diplomacy preserves nothing. Never was there a greater error. So little is Persian Sarakhs important as a fortified point, so little advantage has it over half a dozen other spots in the same locality, that General

MacGregor recommended that the Persians should shift the fort some miles from the present spot.

"Hence it is no gain whatever to England that Russia should have spared New Sarakhs. If she be allowed to settle down on the old site, she might just as well be allowed to have the new town as well. Seven hundred Persian soldiers are no menace to Russia, and directly she establishes herself at Old Sarakhs the Persian fort will become as valueless as the Martello towers on the English coast. On this account, looking at the matter from a broad, comprehensive, military and political point of view, and ignoring the barley-corn measurements of English diplomacy, the occupation of Old Sarakhs by Russia possesses all the significance, and embodies all the menace, that has been ascribed to the act by the ablest generals of England and Russia."

Apart from its military significance, Old Sarakhs was important politically, owing to the circumstance that the Afghan frontier was supposed to touch the Persian border near this point. For years the Persians had controlled the district, and Old Sarakhs was looked upon as indisputably theirs. The Afghan frontier was regarded as commencing alongside it.

By the submission of Youletan and Old Sarakhs, Russia secured the whole of the region of Central Asia lying outside the Afghan frontier marked on Russian and English official maps. She obtained thereby an excellent frontier, well rounded off, and there was absolutely no reason why she should have stepped across it into Afghanistan. England was angry that she should have seized Merv and Sarakhs in violation of her promises, but still, now that Central Asia was blotted out, the public were ready to condone the past. They admitted that there were plenty of excellent reasons to justify the annexation of the steppes and khanates of Central Asia, and so long as the Afghan frontier was respected, they were

prepared to overlook all that had been done to bring the Cossack cordon flush with the Ameer's dominions.

On this account, England received with satisfaction the announcement that Sir Peter Lumsden had been appointed to proceed to Sarakhs to define the Russo-Afghan frontier to the Oxus. In order that the work might be well done, the Government assigned the envoy a brilliant staff of assistants.

Sir Peter Lumsden was an officer of thirty-seven years' standing. He had seen service in various Indian frontier expeditions, the Central India campaign, under General R. Napier, and in the China war. He served with several expeditions against the frontier tribes between 1852 and 1856; was present as deputy quartermaster-general at the action of Punjhaoin April, 1852; at Nowadund and other operations in the Renanzi valley in May, 1852; against the Bori Afridis in 1853; at Shah Mooseh Kheyl against the Meranzi tribe in April, 1855; against Bussy Khilut Alum in 1855; and the Meranzi and Kooroon expedition in 1856 (for which he received the special thanks of the Local and Supreme Governments). He was a member of the special military Commission to Afghanistan in 1857-58, and again received the thanks of the Supreme Government, and was awarded a medal with clasp. He accompanied the expedition to China in 1860, and was present at the actions of Singho and Janchow, the assault and capture of the Taku forts, and the advance on Peking, in connection with which operations he was mentioned in the despatches, received a medal with two clasps, and obtained the brevet of major. His latest active service was with the Bhotan field force in 1865, where he gained an additional clasp. From the foregoing summary of his career it will be seen that the Commissioner possessed a considerable experience of Afghanistan and frontier affairs. He was also a member of the Indian Council.

In India the appointment provoked expressions of dis-

appointment. The Press, almost without exception, had selected General Sir Charles MacGregor for the task. This gallant and distinguished officer, the Skobelev of India, possessed special qualifications for the mission. He had seen as much fighting-service as Lumsden, and while the active military operations of the latter had terminated in 1860 MacGregor had participated in warfare so recently as 1879-81, acting as chief of the staff to General Roberts in Afghanistan. His reputation, therefore, stood high in Russia.

I saw "therefore," because, while for our Afghan war as a whole Russia entertains a contempt, Roberts's operations have always been singled out for special admiration. Skobelev, and all of Skobelev's set, were never tired of extolling the march from Cabul to Candahar. "It was a splendid march," said Skobelev to me. "It was a grand operation of war," said Grodekoff. When I attended Skobelev's funeral, I was repeatedly questioned about the march by his officers, and Roberts's name was never mentioned without respect and admiration.

Skobelev always thought that he should some day lead an army against India. His opponent in that case, he believed, would be Roberts. Being a great man, in every sense of the term, and not a mere military wasp, like our arch-hater, General Sobolev, he took a generous interest in the fortunes of his Indian rival, and I have every reason to believe that this generosity was reciprocated. I can say, at least, that the feeling was prevalent among Roberts's lieutenants. Shortly after Skobelev's death, Sir Charles MacGregor, in expressing to me his regret at his untimely end, said that he admired the brilliant young Russian general so much, that he had been anxious to undertake a journey to Europe solely and expressly for the purpose of making his acquaintance.

Besides being Roberts's ablest lieutenant, MacGregor was the hero of an exploit which should endear him to every



MAJOR-GENERAL SIR PETER STARK LUMSDEN, K.C.B., C.S.L.,
COMMANDER OF THE AFGHAN BOUNDARY COMMISSION.



patriotic Englishman. In 1875, having just finished for the Indian Government an elaborate gazetteer of Afghanistan and Central Asia, which revealed the many serious gaps that existed in our knowledge of that region, he set out, at his own cost and risk, to make a survey without precedent in modern times. Riding from the Persian Gulf, he made his way to Herat, then worked round to Sarakhs, afterwards pushed along the Turcoman frontier to the Caspian; and when this 3,000 miles' ride was done, he quietly travelled on to the Caucasus and South Russia, and effected a survey of the Russian base also. Had he not been foolishly ordered home by the Government, he meant to have surveyed the country just seized by Russia, from Herat to Merv, and in that case the Paropamisus bugbear would have been exploded long before the Afghan war, and the evacuation of Candahar rendered impossible.

After this grand survey, for which, I may add, he was snubbed instead of being thanked by the authorities, he explored Beluchistan, fought alongside Roberts, and was then made head of the Intelligence Branch and Quartermaster-General of India. In India it was a matter of notoriety that MacGregor had studied the Central Asian Question more thoroughly than any military man living, and having a keen perception of good strategical points, it was felt that he would have secured for Afghanistan the strongest possible frontier. Hence, when the Government selected Lumsden, a comparatively unknown man, there was a cry of bitter disappointment in India. The Government, it was said, was going to patch up the Afghan frontier anyhow, as they had patched up everything else.

As I do not know the actual reasons that impelled the Government to chose Lumsden and reject MacGregor, I should be sorry to condemn the selection. I have always had a warm admiration for MacGregor, which has been repeatedly ex-

pressed in my works, and I considered him the right man for the task. But the Government having, from reasons of their own, selected Sir Peter Lumsden, it would have been unpatriotic and ungenerous to have cavilled at the appointment.

Before Sir Peter Lumsden left for the frontier, I had the pleasure of a long conversation with him on Central Asian affairs generally. In order that it should be free and unrestricted, it was agreed that the discussion should be confidential. I am, therefore, precluded from going into details, but I may state that I was thoroughly pleased with the Commissioner's clear appreciation of the issues at stake, and his determination to safeguard English interests. There were no traces of Russophobia in his talk, and I felt that if Russia were as really desirous of harmoniously arranging the frontier as she made out, there could be no possible hitch between him and his Muscovite colleague.

I may point out one very important advantage that has resulted from sending Lumsden to the frontier instead of MacGregor. The former had published nothing on Russia that intriguers in this country could use against him, while the latter had expressed opinions in his books which, if detached and garbled, could have been made to convict him of Russophobia. Had the Skobeleff of India been therefore sent, all the complications that subsequently arose on the frontier would have been laid to his door, as a hater of Russia. This possibility was prevented by sending Lumsden, and not being able to blacken that prudent officer, the Russians have had to pile all the blame on the Afghans and his subordinates.

Very luckily, as events turned out, the Government provided the envoy with a splendid staff. Let me describe some of the members. Among those who proceeded from England, or joined the General on the way to Sarakhs, were Major Napier, Colonel Patrick Stewart, Mr. Condie Stephen, and Captain Barrow. Napier, as I have already said, had

been to the Perso-Turcoman frontier in 1874. He was there repeatedly in subsequent years on behalf of the Government, and thus was not only familiar with the region, but was also intimate with the leading Turcoman chiefs, and knew thoroughly the recent history of the contested country.

Colonel Patrick Stewart was an Indian officer who had done a very patriotic thing in 1880. At that time Skobelev was massing his forces for the purpose, it was believed, of marching to Merv; and, in spite of the excitement provoked in this country thereby, the Government resolutely refused to send anybody to the frontier to find out what he was actually doing. Whereupon, Colonel Patrick Stewart, being at home on furlough, quietly proceeded *via* Turkey, at his own expense, to the East, and, having by a circuitous route reached Ispahan, doffed his European garb, and departed disguised as an Armenian horse dealer. Speaking Armenian well, and being thoroughly acquainted with Eastern habits, Stewart preserved his disguise so well, that when, after twenty-six days' riding, he reached the frontier, close to Geok Tepé, and took a shop in the bazaar, he lived alongside Mr. O'Donovan three weeks without the latter being aware that he was an Englishman.

At length the Government got to know that he was stalking Skobelev, and, to conciliate Russia, ordered him home; but they were so pleased with his conduct that they sent him out soon after to Khaf, a Persian town near Herat, where he could act as English agent for Western Afghanistan, and watch Russia's operations, without exposing England to the danger that might arise from having a political resident installed in the key of India.

Stewart was acquainted with the Russian language, and so also was Captain Barrow, another Indian officer of great ability, who, after studying it at the Staff College, had gone to Russia and buried himself for three months at Moscow to

render his knowledge more perfect. There is little doubt that a distinguished career lies before him. The official Russian scholar, however, was Mr. Condie Stephen, Second Secretary to the Legation at Teheran. He had acquired the language so perfectly while attached to the Embassy at St. Petersburg, that he had been able to render into English a splendidly-spirited translation of Lermantoff's great poem "The Demon." He likewise had travelled along the Sarakhs frontier, and had been grossly insulted by a Russian official in 1882 in making his way to the Atak oasis, for which M. de Giers had made a very lame and inadequate apology. Napier, Stewart, and Condie Stephen were thus three frontier experts equal in knowledge and experience to any Russia could dispatch to confront them. Russia was perfectly aware of this. She, therefore, made no attempt to send any at all, and, instead, shot Gospodin Lessar into London.

The escort and the surveying staff were furnished by India, and had to march through Afghanistan to Herat, and join Sir Peter Lumsden on the Perso-Afghan frontier. The contingent was composed of the following persons:—

Chief Political Officer: Lieutenant-colonel J. West Ridgeway. Political Officers: Captain E. L. Durand, Captain C. E. Yate, Mr. W. K. Merk, Captain de Scessoi. Survey Officers: Major J. Hill, R.E.; Captain St. G. Gore, R.E.; Lieutenant the Hon. M. G. Talbot, R.E. Intelligence Department: Captain P. J. Maitland, Bombay Staff Corps; Captain W. Peacock, R.E. Naturalist: Dr. J. E. T. Aitchison, C.I.E. Medical Officers: Dr. C. Owen, C.I.E.; Dr. Charles. Native Attachés: Sirdar Mahomed Aslam Khan, Rissaldar Baha-ud-kin Khan, Rissaldar Major Mahomed Husain Khan, Sirdar Sher Ahmed Khan.

Colonel Ridgeway, the officer in charge, was a man of great experience. He received his military training in the 98th Regiment, and was appointed to the political service fifteen

years ago by Lord Mayo. During the Afghan war he acted as political officer to Sir Frederick Roberts, and took part in all his military operations. At the close of the campaign he was made Foreign Under Secretary to the Government of India. In this manner he was intimately acquainted with the outer politics of India, and knew thoroughly the views of the Government.

Captain Durand was a son of the hero Sir Henry Durand, and for several years had been acting as political agent attached to the ex-Ameer Yakoob Khan, the ruler who connived at Cavagnari's murder at Cabul. Captain Yate had been political agent at Kelat-i-ghilzai during the Afghan war, and had been besieged there by the enemy. Merk was a wonderful linguist, and was noted for his skill in dealing with hill tribes. Scessoï was a Danish officer, who had once served in the Shah's army. Maitland and Talbot, Gore and Talbot, were Intelligence and Survey officers, noted for their pluck and capacity. The whole of the officers were picked men, and there was not one who had not participated more or less in hard fighting.

As regards the native members, they were all gentlemen of distinguished character and antecedents, and most of them were Afghans. Sirdar Mahomed Aslam Khan was a brother of the British agent at Cabul, and had charge of the local tribal levies of the Khyber. Rissalder Major Mahomed Khan Hussain Khan had been employed for years on various delicate political missions. Rissalder Major Baha-ud-din Khan had served in every Indian campaign for thirty years, and was Sir Frederick Roberts's faithful henchman at Sherpur and Candahar. Sirdar Sher Ahmed Khan was a cousin of the Ameer and a son of the present Afghan Governor of Candahar, and had served as Ridgeway's assistant at Cabul. These native colleagues of the English "politicals" were thus not only most of them old personal friends and fellow-workers of

the latter, but were also closely connected with the Ameer's officials at Cabul and Candahar. This was an immense advantage.

But this was not all. The Afghan Governor of Herat, the Naib-el-Hakmut Mahomed Sarwar Khan, was likewise an old friend of Ridgeway's. The mission was thus certain of a warm reception at Herat. Some troublesome tribes had to be passed at one section of the road (a very small and insignificant section), but every assistance was to be expected from the Ameer's officials.

To protect it against those tribes and any troubles that might arise on the Turcoman frontier, the mission was furnished with an escort composed of 200 men, splendidly mounted, of the 11th Bengal Lancers (better known as "Probyn's Horse") and 250 bayonets of the 20th Punjab Infantry, than which no native regiment in the service contains men of finer physique and bearing. Major Ironside Bax was placed in command.

A correspondent who accompanied the mission says of these Indian troops, "The infantry were almost all light-hearted, cheery Afreedees of the Khyber Pass. They walk with extraordinary rapidity, and are big men. Their march is as quick as the ordinary pace of the cavalry; they are fine high-spirited, free-spoken men, who cheer to the pipes' tunes as they march, and they come in at a swinging pace, with pipes playing, on each camping ground. The cavalry, Sikhs and Rajputs, are also splendid men, possessing excellent spirits, and are well equipped for the journey."

As usual, there were a large number of followers, and these swelled the total to 35 Europeans and 1,300 natives. The transport consisted of 1,300 camels and 400 mules.

To avoid any chance of complications, the mission was ordered to proceed to Herat, not by the direct Candahar road, but by a more circuitous route through country comparatively unpopulated, and consequently free from fanatics.

Quitting Quetta on the 22nd September, the party reached Herat on November 17th, having traversed over 700 miles,* at the average rate of eighteen miles a day, with relatively little hardship, and without any unpleasantness to speak of with the natives. The march was attended with a very important discovery. A route which had been hitherto treated as almost impracticable, was found to be available for the advance of a large army.

In other words, if the Russians penetrated to Herat by the easy roads Lessar had discovered, and we allowed them to remain there, they would be able with very little difficulty to advance into the heart of Afghanistan by the route opened up by Ridgeway's party. Hence the discovery of the practicability of the Nushki route for a large force rendered Herat all the more significant as the Key of India.

Arrived at Herat, Ridgeway was received in the heartiest manner by the Afghan Governor. "The two," says an eyewitness, "shook each other warmly by the hands. The Naib was in the best of humour; his full jovial face, of an olive tint, had a merry look, and his large soft eyes beamed a genial welcome. He looked such a Governor as he was reported to be—mild in his rule, and in his acts showing good sense and practical justice. The good spirits of the Naib appeared to have affected the soldiers and irregular troops. They performed the exercises which we could see they thought would please us most. They were very anxious to win our opinion, and there was something very *naive* in the manner in which they tried to gain it. After the Naib and Colonel Ridgeway had shaken hands, the Afghan infantry were put in fours and marched by companies in front of the mission, with the cavalry in the rear; with each movement the bugles—sweet sounds they were, too—sounded. As the

* 767 from Quetta to Kusan.

troops marched by, the buglers began to play a lively martial air with a French ring. The little we heard of the bugle march was most effective. Many of the men wore woolly hats, which gave them a swaggering look. They were warmly clad and a large number had Sniders. The cavalry were well equipped and capable of going anywhere."

Another officer present says:—"The artillery, consisting of mountain guns, marched past first. The guns appeared to be in good order. The cavalry were rather mounted infantry, and, so far as dress and horse accoutrements, they were perfectly equipped and were much admired by our officers. The irregular horse were better mounted, having larger horses, and had a gallant appearance. They rode by in a free easy pace, moving as if carefully trained. The officers were of many types, but the one who attracted our attention most was a captain, who wore a felt hat, which, if not disrespectful, I should call a billycock hat with a stiff rim and a gold-coloured spike on the top. The other portions of the captain's dress were equally original and displayed much character. He had an Irish-American look, which was exaggerated by a chin tuft, for the captain shaved his cheeks. It was a much-disputed point whether the captain was an Irishman or not. I think he was not ; but what do ye faithful of Hind say to this? The captain had a bulldog, and an excellent one, that ran at his heels and followed him at the side of his Herat regiment. And all this under the shade of Sheik Abdulla Ansari in the Herat valley! It only shows in another way that the Afghans are not all the intolerant fanatics they are supposed to be in England."

Between 2,000 or 3,000 troops mustered on the ground, and their march past was an event of the highest political significance. For the first time, after two generations of war, the Afghans passed in review before and saluted a British officer.

While the Afghans and the Indian contingent were fraternizing in sight of Herat, Sir Peter Lumsden was hastening to join them from Sarakhs. On the 19th of November, after a journey of 1,000 miles from Resht, on the Caspian, he joined Ridgeway's party at Kusan, 70 miles west of Herat, close to the Persian frontier, greatly to the relief of the Afghan governor, for already events had occurred which had occasioned him deep anxiety.

Without waiting for the English and Russian frontier commissions to arrive upon the spot, General Komaroff had occupied Pul-i-Khatun, on the Hari Rud, and Alikhanoff was advancing up the Murghab. The gates of Herat were in danger.

It has been said that the Afghans provoked this advance by seizing Penjdeh, but there are one or two facts that will effectually clear the ground of this contention. Penjdeh was occupied by the Afghans in June or July, 1884. Lumsden left London in September. The occupation of Penjdeh had been announced in English papers a long time before he left, and had been officially admitted by the English Government. There was no secret whatever about it. Why did not the Russian Government raise and settle the question before Lumsden left England? They had already selected their commissioner, General Zelenoi,* and there was no reason why he should not have arrived at Sarakhs in advance of Sir Peter Lumsden. Instead of which they kept him back on various pretexts, and when ours began to approach the frontier from Teheran, they pushed on their troops to Pul-i-Khatun, and endeavoured to carry Penjdeh by a *coup de main*.

* It was erroneously stated, shortly after Lumsden left, that Russia had insulted England by appointing Alikhanoff as the frontier commissioner. There was no ground for this statement. Sir Peter Lumsden himself told me, before his departure, that Zelenoi had been chosen for the post.

Why the Russians should have made this dash at the gates of Herat is capable of simple explanation.

We have seen that for some time after their seizure of Merv their position at Merv was unsafe. It was in March when they effected their swoop; it was in May that Youletan submitted—the Afghans occupied Penjdeh late in June or early in July. Writing from Merv in May, a correspondent of the Tiflis *Kavkaz* stated that there was still a considerable amount of discontent in the Tekke oasis. Until this feeling subsided more, it was hardly safe to make a fresh advance.

Still, Alikhanoff was not a man to rest inactive. The moment the Sariks of Youletan submitted, he commenced intrigues with the Sariks of Penjdeh. As I have already stated, Youletan is geographically part of the Merv oasis. The 4,000 Sarik families dwelling there consequently had always been on good terms with the Merv Tekkes, and the fortunes of the two consequently travelled together. But Penjdeh is 80 miles distant from Youletan, and the interval is an interval of desert. The fertile ground lies behind Penjdeh, towards Herat. Thus, geographically, Penjdeh is to Herat what Youletan is to Merv, and the 8,000 Sarik families dwelling there had not only paid tribute to the Ameer for years, but were the fiercest enemies of the Merv Tekkes.* In this manner the submission of the Youletan Sariks in no wise carried with it the submission of the Sariks of Penjdeh. Had Alikhanoff advanced at once up the Murghab, the Afghan Sariks would have doubtless resisted his attempts to annex them.

Aware of this, Alikhanoff sought to buy them over. He sent agents to Penjdeh to endeavour to persuade the people

* See Petrusevitch's report in "Merv, the Queen of the World," and Lessar's accounts of his own explorations, in the "Russians at Merv."

to declare for Russia. Reports of this reaching the Afghan Governor of Herat, he marched a small force to the place, and, with the perfect concurrence of the inhabitants, erected a fort at Ak Tepe to protect them from Alikhanoff.

Considering the treacherous trick Alikhanoff had played on the people of Merv, and which was better known to the surrounding people than to this country, was there anything aggressive or unwarrantable in this? To my view, it was an unostentatious measure of defence of the most legitimate character, and no more carried with it any menace to the security of Merv than the English occupation of Cairo in 1881 interfered with the interests of Timbuctoo. Russia was chagrined at the failure of her intrigues at Penjdeh, but she masked her anger for the moment. She allowed two months to pass, apparently acquiescing in the occupation of Penjdeh, and at any rate refraining from the projected swoop upon the other gates of the Key of India. She refrained, partly because she wanted to make her Merv base safer, but mainly because she believed that the Indian contingent would never traverse Afghanistan without a complication of some kind with the natives.

It may be remembered that just before the departure of Ridgeway, frequent reports reached India of the presence of Russian secret agents at Cabul. How far these were true it is difficult to say. One thing, however, is certain. Russian officers in disguise have unquestionably visited Cabul since we installed Abdurrahman as Ameer,* and as their presence was attended by the receipt of similar reports in India, it is not improbable that some were there again last year. At any rate, Russia believed for a long time that the Ameer would refuse to allow the Indian mission to pass through his

* See narrative of Samuel Gourovitch, interpreter to the Venkhovsky secret mission of 1882, in "The Region of Eternal Fire."

dominions, and when his permission was given they relied upon the treachery of his officials and the hostility of the people to prevent it ever reaching Herat. When these expectations failed to be realised, decisive action was decided upon. Moving 40 miles south of Old Sarakhs, where he had established 200 infantry and several hundred Turcoman horse, General Komaroff placed a Cossack outpost at Pul-i-Khatun.

This marked the beginning of the Russian advance from the Merv-Sarakhs bases upon the gates of the Key of India.

Lumsden first heard of the movement at Meshed. Proceeding to Pul-i-Khatun he found the Cossacks established there, and pushing on to Sarakhs (Nov. 8) obtained a promise from Komaroff that there should not be any further advance, pending the settlement of the frontier question by their respective governments. Alikhanoff was with Komaroff at the time, and rode right through the English camp one day without taking any notice of the Commissioner. This insult caused a great talk at Sarakhs. Directly Lumsden left Sarakhs Alikhanoff set off for Merv, and, taking with him several hundred horsemen, pushed up to the Murghab, and tried to capture Penjdeh.

The Afghans, however, were again equal to the occasion. The moment Yaluntush Khan, Governor of Penjdeh, heard of the advance he sent a message to Ghaus-ud-din, Governor of Bala Murghab (on the road to Herat), and the latter, with laudable promptitude and energy, started off accompanied by all his cavalry, with a foot soldier behind each trooper. At the same time he despatched a courier to Herat for reinforcements. Arrived at Penjdeh, he found Alikhanoff posted at Pul-i-khisti, a few miles distant. To him he at once sent a message, asking him if he meant to fight or not, frankly informing him that he was ready for the conflict. Alikhanoff,

disappointed at being outwitted, returned a savage and insulting letter to the Afghan general and withdrew. Had he not done so, the Afghans were so excited that they would have probably attacked him. According to a correspondent, their blood was up, and they were most anxious to fight.

Russia, having now cast off the veil, no longer attempted concealment. Her Cossacks were pushed forward as fast as they could, and occupied in swift succession the Zulfikar Pass, Ak Robat, and other avenues to Herat.

It has been said that Afghan restlessness provoked this advance. This I am able to deny on unquestionable authority. The Ameer's right to Penjdeh will be dealt with directly. The annexation of that place, as I have demonstrated, provoked no feeling in Russia, and evoked no immediate reciprocal move. The real Afghan advance that Russia puts forward as excusing her own advance, subsequent to Sir Peter Lumsden's arrival, was the advance from Penjdeh to Sariyazi, a short distance to the south. But what are the facts of the case? There was no occupation of Sariyazi in the annexationist sense of the term. Hearing that the Russians had advanced from Sarakhs to Puli-i-Khatun, and tried to cut off some Afghan horsemen, led by an Afghan official, proceeding to join Sir Peter Lumsden, the plucky Governor of Bala Murghab I have just described thought that the Russians meant war. They were advancing up the Hari Rud towards Herat; perhaps they were also moving up the parallel River Murghab in the same direction. He was in charge of the Murghab line of defence. It was his duty to bar the road to Herat. He, therefore, like a good soldier, sent out an Afghan picket to Sariyazi, so that Fort Ak Tepe at Penjdeh might know in time of the advance of the enemy. Sariyazi was not on Merv soil, whether it was Afghan or not. Thanks to this picket, when Alikhanoff did

advance with his horsemen, his approach was signalled in time, and his *coup de main* frustrated.

Thus there was no restlessness, no aggression on the part of the Afghans. They set an example of good order and good faith to the Russians, which would have done credit to any civilised power.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUESTION OF THE BOUNDARIES.

Russia's claim to the gates of Herat—The original agreement between England and Russia as to the Afghan frontier—The disputed territory—Discrepancies in English official maps—The frontier generally recognised by the two countries—Skobeleff's map of Merv and Herat, showing what Russia regarded as the frontier in 1881—Lessar's mission to London—The Russian claims impartially considered.

RUSSIA'S claim to cave in the Afghan frontier appears to have been first officially made shortly after the annexation of Merv, when the Russian General Staff issued a sixpenny map, showing the Sarakhs-Oxus border bulged in to within 50 miles of Herat. This, I believe, was the first official intimation that Russia had adopted Petrusevitch's idea.

I issued a facsimile copy of the map, which found its way into the principal English newspapers, and the Russian claim was indignantly denounced. Still, none the less, the impression prevailed that the map was only a feeler. Russia had demanded a good deal, in the hope of getting at least some small concession. The English Government had a reputation for yielding to pressure. When Sir Peter Lumsden left England, it was generally believed by those behind the scenes that England had surrendered Pul-i-Khatun. I cannot say how far this report was true. I simply record what impression prevailed at the time.

On this account, when the news was telegraphed from Meshed that the Russians had occupied Pul-i-Khatun, it fell to a certain extent flat. Russia had greedily taken in advance what had been promised her after the frontier was settled, and the move was simply another instance of her barbarous

manners. It was never imagined that she claimed all the Afghan territory to the gates of Herat.

At length, after a deal of uneasiness and indignation had been expressed at Zelenoi's unaccountable tardiness in proceeding to the Afghan frontier, it became suddenly known in London that Russia had pushed up to Penjdeh. While the excitement was still in progress, the Russian Government unexpectedly dispatched the ex-railway engineer, Lessar, to London to expound its claims. The demands of Russia then became public.

An elaborate account of those demands, with the Russian arguments in favour, and the English arguments against them, would only tire the reader. Let me, therefore, put the case as shortly, but as plainly, as possible.

In 1872 elaborate negotiations took place between the Russian and English Governments with regard to the north-east Afghan frontier. The Russian advance then lay through Turkestan, and the Orenburg Cossacks had reached the Oxus. It was necessary, therefore, to define in some manner the Oxus side of the Ameer's dominions. After long negotiations this was accomplished, and as since there has been no infringement of that frontier, we may dismiss it without further remark.

Respecting the north-west border, from the Oxus to Persia, the settlement was not so satisfactory, nor could it be so. The Russians even then had designs upon Merv, which we wished to treat as part of Afghanistan, and they therefore desired to draw the line south of it. By assenting to this, it was thought at the time we should surrender the Tekke oasis to Russia. Ultimately the matter was left open.

Considering that the Turcoman barrier was still unbroken, that Herat was in a turbulent condition, and that the Merv region seethed with disorder, this course of action on the part of the two Governments cannot be severely criticised.

They had fixed the starting-point of the line at Khoja Saleh, on the Oxus, which no Russian has since contested, and if the term, "Persian frontier," or "Hari Rud," be not a precise termination, we must bear in mind that the gaze of the two Governments and the two nations was not fixed upon the end of the line, so much as upon the middle. There was no quarrelling about the termination of the line, only whether the line itself should curve north or curve south. If it curved north Merv was included in Afghanistan; if south it was excluded from it. As time passed on, the English and Russian Governments decided to treat it as excluded from Afghanistan, although this country still reserved its right to watch the fortunes of the Tekkes.

As regards the terminal point, discrepancies undoubtedly exist on the official maps of the two countries, but an overwhelming majority of both fix it at Sarakhs, and it is particularly noteworthy that cartographical harmony was arrived at during the period immediately preceding the advance upon Merv. The map that Skobelev used in his Turcoman war of 1881 traced the frontier from Khoja Saleh to Sarakhs identically with Arrowsmith's map of 1875, published in Rawlinson's "England and Russia in the East"—that English official text book of the early phases of the Central Asian question—and this line was practically admitted by Russian diplomacy.

We may say, in short, that after Russia began to push seriously towards Merv, the Sarakhs-Khoja Saleh line was tacitly adopted by the statesmen of the two countries as the north-west frontier of Afghanistan. It is well that there should be no misconception about this. Russia knew that England considered this line the Afghan frontier, and, therefore, when her statesmen gave assurance after assurance that they would not violate the integrity of Afghanistan, they were aware that England accepted those assurances in

good faith as implying that the Sarakhs-Khoja-Saleh boundary would be respected.

Nay, Russian statesmen themselves by their words fixed the line, and showed that they recognized Sarakhs as the terminal point. Let me quote one instance. Early in 1882, a year before the swoop on Merv took place, England endeavoured to persuade Russia to come to some settlement about the Perso-Turcoman frontier, stretching from near Askabad to Sarakhs. Russia in reply said, in effect, that it was no business of England's, but, if she liked, she would discuss the settlement of the Afghan boundary beyond, from Sarakhs to Khoja Saleh.

This recognition of the Sarakhs line was made during a special interview between Prince Lobanoff and Earl Granville on February 22, 1882. Directly the Russian ambassador was gone, Earl Granville wrote to Sir Edward Thornton as follows:—"Prince Lobanoff said he had now received the reply of his Government. They acknowledged the continued validity of the agreement formerly entered into by Prince Gortschakoff, by which Afghanistan was admitted to be beyond the sphere of Russian influence. That agreement was, however, as I had said, incomplete; and they were ready to supplement it by a settlement of the frontier of Afghanistan from the point where it had been left undefined" (*i.e.*, the Oxus at Khoja Saleh) "*as far as Sarakhs.*" Thus the Russian ambassador in London treated Sarakhs as the ending point. Five weeks later M. de Giers discussed the whole subject with Sir Edward Thornton, when the Russian statesman stated positively that "Russia had no intention of advancing towards Merv or Sarakhs, or occupying any territory beyond what was already in her possession." At the end of the despatch Sir Edward Thornton observes:—"M. de Giers added that, with a view to preventing disturbances on the borders of Afghanistan, he con-

sidered it to be of great importance that the boundary of that country *from Khoja Saleh to the Persian frontier in the neighbourhood of Sarakhs* should be formally and definitely laid down, and that he had instructed Prince Lobanoff to endeavour to induce her Majesty's Government to agree to the adoption of measures for that purpose."*

Thus Russian diplomatists, as well as the official military map-makers, regarded the Afghan frontier as running from Khoja Saleh to Sarakhs, and the only point really undetermined by diplomacy was, where it crossed the Murghab river; but here, again, as Russian diplomatists followed their military map-makers as regards the two terminal points, it was a fair assumption that they followed them also in regard to the Murghab section. When English statesmen asked the statesmen of Russia for assurances, and the latter gave the solemn word of the Emperor that Afghanistan should be respected, those military maps, English and Russian, were, in almost every instance, and probably in all, lying on the tables or placed on the walls of the rooms where those assurances were given. To say, therefore, that Russian statesmen did not have the Sarakhs-Khoja-Saleh line in view, and in their minds, when they made these assurances, is to say that they were simply playing the part of blackleg lawyers, or Jesuits of the darkest hue.

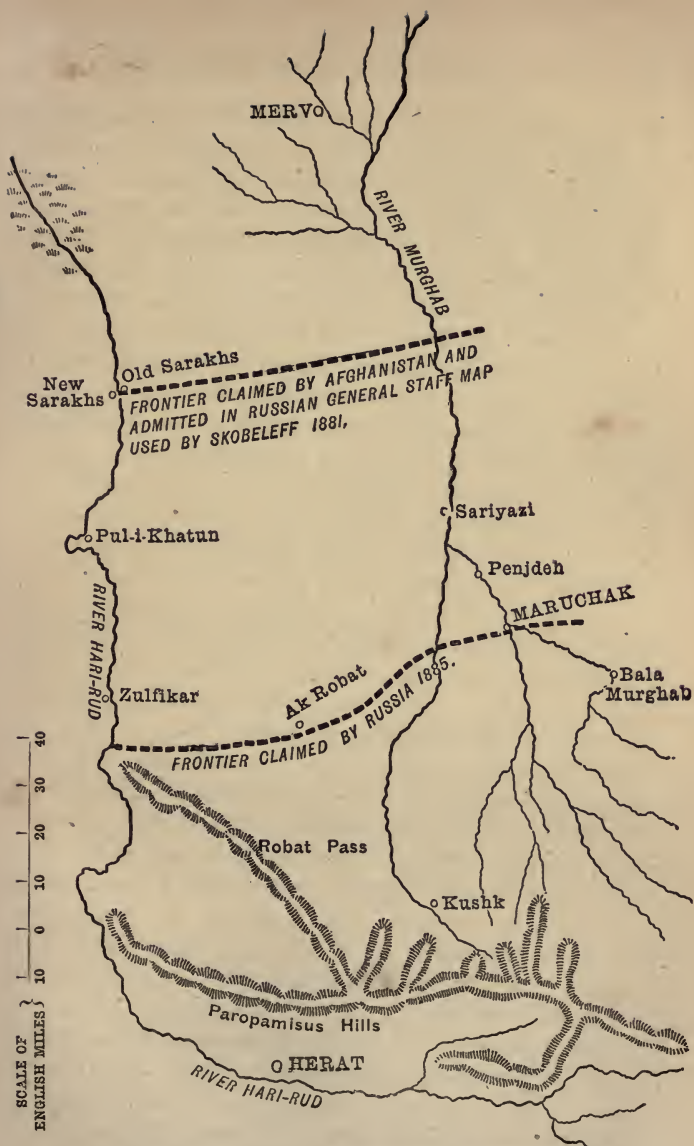
Now this line not only includes Penjdeh, which is a good forty miles to the south of it, and Sariyazi, which is at least twenty, but also every point claimed or occupied by Russia. The Ameer, in occupying Penjdeh simply occupied what Russian maps showed to be in his dominions. On the other hand, when Komaroff, many weeks later, occupied Pul-i-Khatun, 39 miles from Sarakhs, he occupied what Russian maps excluded from Turkmenia and also placed in

* Blue Book, Central Asia, No. 1, 1884.

Afghanistan. He violated, in short, the integrity of the territory of the Amêer. And the further he subsequently advanced, to Zulfikar and Ak Robat, the more he violated that integrity. In one plain word, he invaded Afghanistan. He crossed the line which Russian statesmen, in giving their assurances, had always treated as the boundary of the Ameer's dominions. Had Skobeleff marched to Merv in 1881, his movements would have been regulated by that line, for it was marked on the map which he used at the seat of war, and which is now in my possession. It bears the imprint of the Russian General Staff, 1881 (copies of it exist at the Foreign Office), and it was given me by General Grodekoff, the chief of his staff at Geok Tepé, in 1882.

The occupation of Penjdeh by the Ameer having preceded by a considerable time the Russian annexation of Pul-i-Khatun, let me deal with it first. In starting, I would point out that while one or two Russian maps anterior to 1881 show discrepancies in crossing the Murghab, they all of them unanimously assign Penjdeh to Afghanistan. Nor is this remarkable. Before the Sariks occupied the place it belonged to the Jemshidis, subjects of the Ameer. The Sariks formerly dwelt at Merv. In 1856 the Tekkes migrated thither, and after a struggle compelled the Sariks to withdraw higher up the Murghab. Part of them, as I have said, stopped at Youletan, geographically part of the Merv oasis; but the rest, numbering over 6,000 families, moved higher up, traversing the desert section of the Murghab, and drove the Jemshidis out of Penjdeh. The Jemshidis, in their turn, also moved higher up, to within a short distance of Herat.

But it is well to bear in mind that these Sariks, having seized Afghan lands, paid annually tribute to the Ameer for them. The receipts of the tribute received are contained in the books of the administrative of Herat, and there can be



MAP SHOWING THE DISPUTED TERRITORIES.



therefore no doubt on this point. It has been said that the tribute was sometimes not paid without the dispatch of troops to the district, but this does not invalidate the Ameer's claim. For instance, as I pen this very passage, the tax-gatherer has sent in to say that if my taxes are not paid within three days he will distrain for them. I reply, telling him to be hanged, but this retort to his threat of force does not dispose of the right of the Government to treat me as a subject, and seize my property if the taxes are not paid. In Afghanistan, and, in fact, in all eastern countries, the soldier is invariably the tax-gatherer. Throughout the whole of the Russian Asiatic dominions the Cossack goes round with the tax-gatherer, and, but for the Cossack, the taxes would very often not be paid. The collection of taxes or tribute at Penjdeh by the occasional dispatch of Herati horseman, therefore, was simply part and parcel of a prevailing system in the East, and not an exceptional case. The contention that Penjdeh was not an Afghan district because the Sariks (like myself) were sometimes remiss in paying their taxes, will not hold water one moment.

Having treated Penjdeh as an administrative part of Herat so many years, the Afghan authorities were consequently within their rights when they sent a small force there in June or July, 1884, to protect it from seizure by Alikhanoff. They knew how treacherously Russia had acted at Merv, and had every reason to believe that Alikhanoff was bent upon seizing Penjdeh.

I have already said that the subsequent advance 20 miles to Sariyazi was simply the pushing out of a picket to give warning of the expected Russian approach, and that had not Russia seized Pul-i-Khatun, no such movement would have been made. There was, therefore, no provocation on the Afghan side.

With regard to Russia the case was different. Pul-i-Khatun,

and the rest of the uninhabited points up the Hari Rud south of Sarakhs, had never been part of the Merv territory, nor had the Mervis ever had control of the districts. Those districts were unprotected, simply because the raids of the Tekkes upon Persia had driven back the people to the Paropamisus or elsewhere, or had exterminated them outright. But although the Mervis raided across the country in pushing towards Persia, they never attempted to hold it; for geographically it had no connection with Merv whatever. The argument has been put forward that the Russians had a right to seize it because it was "unoccupied," but if that argument were to be allowed to pass, a large proportion of the coast line of Australia could be seized on the same grounds; and, applying it to Russia, hundreds of miles of coast line in the Pacific and on the White Sea would be open to seizure, not being occupied or administered.

If the Afghans had been making preparations to march to Pul-i-Khatun, there might have been some justification for Komaroff's occupation of it; but they were quietly posted at Penjdeh, awaiting Lumsden's arrival. Before even Lumsden himself could make any preparations of the kind, and give provocation thereby, the Russians had advanced and seized all the territory they could lay their hands on without actually dispossessing the Afghans. In some places they pushed behind the Afghans, as at Ak Robat, which is considerably to the rear of Penjdeh, and within 80 miles of Herat.

On this account, I hold that this rush to the gates of Herat was a violent and treacherous proceeding, having all the characteristics of the swoop upon Merv.

While the movement was being made towards Herat, "by the express orders of Prince Dondukoff Korsakoff," as Komaroff gave out, the Russian Government was effecting an operation of another kind, which indicates the kind of enemy we have to deal with. Imagining there were no experts in

London, Lumsden having taken with him Stewart, Napier, and Condie Stephen to the frontier, it suddenly dispatched their own chief agent, Lessar, to this country.

Russia delights in strokes of this sort. She always does "the unexpected." In 1878, when we were increasing our fleet to fight her, she suddenly dispatched sailors to America and bought ships, with the intention of slipping out of the Atlantic ports and preying on our commerce. Our fleet she did not mean to notice at all. No country is more ready to discover the weak points of a rival, and to take advantage of them, than Russia. She displayed this clearly enough when she sent Lessar to London.

I say this without making any reflection upon Lessar personally, for my high opinion of him has been repeatedly avowed in my books. I may even go so far to claim that the reputation which he possessed in the eyes of the public and Government of this country, on his arrival in February, was largely a reputation of my own creation. When Lessar's name was first heard in this country in 1882, it was coupled with the epithet of "spy" and "secret agent." I defended him against those charges. Year after year, as I described his successive explorations in my books,* and expounded their importance, I insisted upon the honest, sincere, and unaffected character of the clever young explorer. This opinion was not simply based upon what had been said to me by his superiors in Russia, but upon what I had heard from Russian friends of mine, who knew him well. I may add that this attitude was not lost upon Lessar, for, shortly after his arrival in London, he thanked me warmly in a letter for the kindly manner I had always referred to his surveys.

Hence, I wish it to be clearly understood that in saying

*"The Russian Advance," 1882; the "Russians at Merv and Herat," 1883; "Reconnoitring Central Asia," 1884.

what follows, I am inspired by no animus against Lessar, nor do I wish to excite any prejudice against his person. I criticise his mission, and the Government that created it: if my remarks appear to touch Lessar himself sometimes, I must ask that they be understood as applying to him, not as the eminent explorer, but as the mouthpiece of the Russian Foreign Office.

Up to the time of the swoop upon Merv, Gospodin Lessar was simply a railway engineer. It was in that capacity he had been dispatched on his first survey in the direction of India in 1881, and he was still a *Tchinovnik* attached to the Ministry of Railways. The Russian Government was perfectly aware of the high estimation in which this railway engineer was held in England. It, therefore, suddenly turned him into a diplomatist, and, after a decent interval, with equal suddenness sent him to London.

His proper place, of course, was on the Afghan frontier, as adviser to Zelenoi. Russia had no intention of sending Zelenoi thither. She had certainly appointed him before Lumsden left London, but she had only done this to gain time to mature her military preparations for seizing the gates of Herat. Once those gates were seized, she no longer needed a delimitation commission. What she needed was to break down English opposition to that seizure. For this purpose, it was necessary to create a "cave" in English opinion: to divide the country on the subject, and to force the Government to yield to the pressure of accomplished facts.

To realise this treacherous aim Lessar was sent to London.

Without dipping too deeply into a very unpleasant subject, I may recall to the reader the very strong pro-Russian influence that was exercised in 1877-78, through books, pamphlets, and the press, by Madame de Novikoff, otherwise O. K., and the group of admirers she gathered around her.

I will not discuss whether that influence was good or bad, but I will point out that it was a strong influence, and that it exercised an effect upon English public opinion and upon the policy of the Government. At any rate, that, at least, was the impression in Russia.

What, therefore, M. de Giers had in view when he dispatched this amiable young traveller, Lesser, to London was, the formation of another pro-Russian party. He trusted to winning the battle of the boundaries, not on the frontier, but in the midst of distracted England.

It was rather cruel, using such a weapon against Mr. Gladstone.

Fortunately, party feeling did not run so high as in 1878, and Lessar found when he arrived a solid block of public opinion opposed to his pretensions. Still he was not altogether without success. The *Pall Mall Gazette* opened its columns to his pen and became his mouthpiece. The wires of the press were pulled, and all manner of charges raked up against the Afghans. Even Sir Peter Lumsden's mission was assailed.

Let me give an example of some of these unscrupulous charges. On February 24th the *Pall Mall Gazette* published a long letter from Madame de Novikoff at St. Petersburg, in which that lady said that "one who is of the highest authority on all matters relating to the foreign policy of our Empire" had told her Penjdeh had been occupied by the Afghans at the instigation of Mr. Condie Stephen and other subordinates of Sir Peter Lumsden. "I have just had a most interesting conversation," said Madame de Novikoff, "with one who is of the highest authority on all matters relating to the foreign policy of our empire. . . . I asked him to tell me quite frankly the *vérité vraie* about our alleged advance in Herat. 'The question,' he replied, 'is as simple as possible. We do not want Herat, and we cannot

get it. If we seized it, it would bring us into conflict not only with the Afghans but also with Persia (*sic*), not to speak of England.' 'But,' I rejoined, 'have we not already made a forward movement which we thought unnecessary?' 'Yes,' he answered 'but do you know how this came to pass? Unfortunately Sir Peter Lumsden has taken with him two or three young fellows like Mr. Stephen, who speak Russian, and who imagine that they can serve their cause, or the cause of England, by inciting the Afghans to occupy positions in advance of their own frontier. *The Afghans, acting under the instigation of these young Englishmen,* occupied a position at Penjdeh, in territory which had never been under Afghan rule. . . . Our military people, hearing and seeing everywhere evidences of English hostility and English intrigues, immediately responded to the Afghan advance by a further advance on their own account, and they went further than was either prudent or useful. Thus a mistake has been made on both sides, but the initiative has been taken by the English or by those among them who pushed the Afghans forward to go where no Afghan had ever been before."

Now there is only one English expression that will fitly describe all the foregoing. That expression is a strong one, but it is no stronger than any judge would apply to it at a court of law. The whole statement is a "pack of lies."

If this expression seems severe, it should be remembered that Lumsden and his subordinates, honourable English gentlemen, and not intriguers like Alikhanoff, were far away from home when their character was thus grossly assailed, and that they were traduced by an intriguing agency planted in our midst for the purpose of enabling Lessar to secure for Russia what he could have never obtained by fair argument on the frontier.

In the first place, it was announced in all the English and

Russian newspapers before Sir Peter Lumsden, with Mr. Stephen, left England, that the Afghans had occupied Penjdeh; so that the assertion that Mr. Stephen instigated them to do it is absurdly mendacious. Mr. Stephen travelled with Sir Peter Lumsden the whole way, and it was long before they reached the frontier that they heard Komaroff had seized Pul-i-Khatun. The two then proceeded straight to Sarakhs to see Komaroff and protest, and they were told that Komaroff had been ordered to advance by the orders of the Russian Government. Thus we see that the Russians advanced long before Sir Peter Lumsden and his rash "young Englishmen" arrived on the scene, and the statement therefore that they egged on the Afghans and thereby provoked it, is an obvious falsehood. What I say of Lumsden's own party applies equally to the Indian contingent. The Afghans did not advance an inch after the English arrived at Herat, and as the Pul-i-Khatun movement of Russia was made anterior to our arrival, it is therefore false to say that we incited the Afghans to aggression.

It is unpleasant to have to say it, but Madame de Novikoff is given to making charges of this kind. It would be easy to multiply instances of her "special pleading." Let me quote a characteristic instance. In 1881, while Skobeleff was besieging Geok Tepé, a certain Captain Butler, out of a desire for notoriety, wrote to the *Globe* intimating that he had helped the Tekkes to fortify the place. The assertion occasioned a good deal of annoyance to our government, and being altogether unfounded, Butler was placed on the retired list. In Russia, what he said was never taken seriously, and not only did the press pooh-pooh his pretensions, but Skobeleff himself laughed at the idea. My conversation with him on the matter was published in "The Russian Advance Towards India," which book contained further the opinions of Grodekoff, &c., completely disposing of Butler's claim. Not long afterwards

Madame de Novikoff published a work called "Skobelev and the Panslavist Cause." In this she embodied the whole of my conversation with Skobelev, but suppressed the bit about Butler. Then at the end, when she made an onslaught on Rawlinson and the Russophobes, she penned this assertion:—"The Atrek frontier was the line along which your Central Asians and ours elected to fight. *An English officer, Butler, fortified Geok Tepé!*"

Yet O.K. knew when she penned this passage that Butler did not fortify Geok Tepé, and that her idol, Skobelev, who was surely a good judge, had declared he had not. But she wanted to make a case against England, and was ready to write that black was white, and white was black, in order to further her ends.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* proved an efficient organ for the pro-Russian party. Day after day it formulated the charges against the Afghans, and suppressed facts that clashed at all with its views. An illustration may be given of this. On February 27th it published an article, entitled, "Is Penjdeh in Afghanistan?—By a Russian" (ascribed by the *Moscow Gazette* to Lessar), in which an elaborate attempt was made by references to faulty, obsolete English maps, and the works of two or three careless authors, to prove that Penjdeh was not in the Ameer's dominions. I thereupon wrote a short letter stating the facts about the Russian official maps I have mentioned, and which Lessar had ignored, and I enclosed a facsimile sketch of the frontier on Skobelev's map. Both of these were suppressed.

But this was only a minor matter. On the 12th of March it published a special article, with a map, in which it claimed that Lessar's demands were moderate, on the ground that I myself had assigned to Afghanistan a frontier line in 1881 further south than the one he proposed!

I have already spoken of Petrusevitch's idea of thrusting

a wedge from Merv and Sarakhs to the gates of Herat. That idea, I mentioned, seemed to me so fraught with danger, that I wrote a book on it—"Merv the Queen of the World"—illustrating the serious character of the claim in a series of maps. On those maps I drew the Afghan frontier as Petrusevitch desired it to be, and I said on the first of the series that the frontier was Petrusevitch's. The whole purport of the book, I should add, was to expose and denounce this pretention. Well, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, ignoring the whole book, tore out one of the maps, and declared that "I" had assigned the wedge frontier to Afghanistan, and had supported it!

Now, if the Russian case was so sound, why was all this lying needed? As a retort, let me mention something about the *Pall Mall Gazette*. On the 22nd February, 1884, it published an article with a map, in which it denounced the fuss about the annexation of Merv, implying it would lead to nothing further, and said that "Mr. Charles Marvin and Mr. Ashmead Bartlett were the only two alarmists in the country." In that map the *Pall Mall Gazette* itself traced the Afghan frontier as running from Sarakhs to Imam Bukush, north of all the country now occupied by Russia.

It was by such artifices as the manipulation of my maps that the pro-Russian party in London did their best to break down English opposition to the Russian retention of the gates of Herat. Lesssar's mission was not wholly without success. If he did not create a cave, he made a rift in English public opinion. When he first arrived the Gladstone Government angrily demanded that Russia should immediately withdraw from the gates of Herat. England virtually presented an ultimatum. Before he had been a month in London the Government, yielding to the insidious pressure exercised at home, and the determined front made by Russia on the Afghan frontier, withdrew that ultimatum.

CHAPTER V.

HOW HERAT IS THE KEY OF INDIA.

Misconceptions respecting Herat—What Russian and English generals really mean when they call it the Key of India—The midway camping-ground between the Caspian and India—Russia's intrusion on the camping-ground—Character of the country claimed or occupied by Russia—Impossibility of severing it from Herat—No mountain barrier whatever between Herat and the new Russian outposts—The tribes on the Russo-Afghan frontier—Russia's design on Afghan Turkestan.

“A BODY of European troops established at Herat, and standing with its front to the south-east, would draw upon it the attention of the whole population of India. In that lies the significance of a military occupation of Herat; and it is not without reason that a number of English experts, knowing India well, have expressed their belief that were an enemy to occupy Herat with a powerful force, the English army, without having fired a shot, would consider itself half beaten.”

These words were penned by General Soboleff in 1882. He was then chief of the Asiatic branch of the General Staff, and exercised a large control over the Russian military advance in Central Asia. Subsequently he was appointed Minister of War in Bulgaria, where he distinguished himself by his zeal in Russianizing the country, with the idea of hastening the time for a fresh advance upon Constantinople. More recently he has rendered himself notorious by a fierce tirade against England, published in the *Russ* about a month after the time Komaroff and Alikhanoff insulted Sir Peter Lumsden at Sarakhs.

“Herat is a very large city, and does not cede in size to

Tashkent. It contains 50,000 people. Among the cities of Central Asia and Khorassan, Herat, by its buildings, occupies a place next to Meshed. The city is surrounded by walls twelve feet high, with a shallow ditch outside. There are no outer defences of any kind; nothing that would call to mind the fortifications of a European city. In its present condition, Herat is not in a position to defend itself against a European army, since at a mile to the north it is commanded by heights, from which it could be bombarded by artillery. It is reckoned to possess immense strategical importance."

This brief account was written some years ago by General Grodekoff, the officer appointed by Alexander II. to act as chief of Kaufmann's staff in 1878, when an attack upon India was projected. After peace was concluded at Berlin, he rode home from Tashkent through Herat, and stayed at the place several days. The opinions of Soboleff and Grodekoff, as military officers of high rank and capacity, are surely worth consideration; yet we have certain political flounders in our midst who say that, "After all, they doubt whether Herat is of any real value to India."

They say this, ignoring what Sir Henry Hamley, Sir Frederick Roberts, Sir Charles MacGregor, Lord Napier of Magdala, and other great English generals have spoken or written respecting the "immense strategical importance of Herat." The public have their choice. On the one hand are the carefully-weighed opinions of a great array of brilliant soldiers, who have fought and bled for the Empire; on the other is the hare-brained chatter of a few political babblers, who have done their utmost to involve that Empire in its present complications. Now is the time for England to make up her mind about Herat. She can safeguard it, or she can let it drift into Russia's possession. One thing, however, she would do well to realise in time—if *she* does not

value Herat, Russia does ; and Russia values it so much that, by hook or by crook, she means to have it.

To a reporter of the Press Association, Lessar said, March 15th :—"We have no intentions on Herat, which is altogether out of the sphere of our action."

The same Lessar wrote to the *Novoe Vremya* in November, 1883, when the Russian troops were already massing on the Tejend and in Khiva for Alikhanoff's dash upon Merv :—"The longer Merv remains independent, the better for Russia ; its occupation would not be difficult, while its possession would be extremely unprofitable."

On February 29th, 1882, M. de Giers said to Sir Edward Thornton, using the very words employed by Lessar : "Russia has no intentions whatever of occupying Merv and Sarakhs." Within two years from this period of "no intentions" Merv was a Russian possession.

So that it will not do to rely upon Russia's disinterestedness as a safeguard to Herat. The question, therefore, to consider is—Is Herat worth safeguarding, and can we safely allow Russia to remain in possession of its gates ?

The city of Herat has found an eloquent historian in the person of Colonel Malleon, whose "Herat : the Granary and Garden of the East" ought to be read by everybody at this juncture. It is one of the oldest cities in the East and was once one of the richest. To use the words of a Persian geographer, "the city has been fifty times taken, fifty times destroyed, and fifty times has it risen from its ashes." Six hundred and sixty years ago it contained, according to the records of the period, 12,000 retail shops, 6,000 public baths, caravanserais, and water mills, 350 schools and monastic institutions, and 144,000 occupied houses, and was yearly visited by caravans from all parts of Asia. When Chingiz Khan passed across the East, devastating the region, Herat is said to have suffered by the two stormings it experienced at his

hands a loss of a million and a half of men. In subsequent ages its splendour revived, and it was a great and flourishing city down to comparatively modern times.

Summing up in his masterly manner the career of Herat, Colonel Malleeson says :—"A glance at the record of the past will show that from time immemorial the city was regarded as an outlying bulwark, the possession of which was necessary prior to attempting the conquest of India ; the holding of which by India or by quasi-vassal powers dependent on India, would render impossible an invasion of that country. It was so considered by Alexander, by Mahmud and his successors, by Chingiz Khan, by Taimur, by Nadir Shah, by Ahmad Shah, and by Muhammad Shah, the Persian Prince who attacked in 1837. In the cases of all but the last the possession of Herat led to the conquest of India ; in the case of the last the successful defence of that city rendered invasion impossible.

"The hasty reader may object—what can the possession of one city signify? A question of this nature touches the real point of the argument. Herat is called the gate of India, because through it, and through it alone, the valleys can be entered which lead to the only vulnerable part of India. Those valleys, running nearly north and south, are protected to the east by inaccessible ranges, to the west by impracticable deserts. No invading army could dare to attempt to traverse the great salt desert, and the desert immediately south of it, the Dasht-i-Naubad, whilst a British army held Herat. As long as that army should hold Herat, so long would an invasion of India be impossible. In his masterly lecture at the Royal United Institution, in November, 1878, General Hamley laid down the broad principle that if England were to hold the western line of communication with India, that by Herat and Candahar, she need not trouble herself much about the eastern, or the Cabul line. On the same occa-

sion, Sir Henry Rawlinson declared, in reply to a question put to him by Lord Elcho, that rather than allow the occupation of Herat by Russia, he would venture the whole might of British India. That high authority saw clearly what I have feebly endeavoured to demonstrate in these pages—that the possession of Herat by Russia means the possession of that one line by which India can be invaded; that the possession of Herat by England means the annihilation of all the Russian hopes of an invasion of India. Let the reader imagine that Candahar is the frontier British station; that between Herat and Candahar is a long lane, so protected on both sides that the man who may wish to traverse any part of it to Candahar must enter by Herat. Is it not obvious that the power which shall hold Herat will completely dominate the lane? It is this which makes the possession of Herat by England a matter of vital consequence.

“Another fact illustrates the enormous value of Herat. Place an army there, and nothing need be brought to it from Europe. Within the limits of the Herati territory all the great roads leading on India converge. The mines of the Herati district supply lead, iron, and sulphur; the surface of many parts of the country is laden with saltpetre; the willow and the poplar, which make the best charcoal, abound; the fields produce in abundance corn, and wine, and oil. From the population, attracted to its new rulers by good government, splendid soldiers might be obtained.

“Such are the military advantages presented by Herat to the power that shall occupy it. Should that power be an enemy, Herat would be to him an eye to see and an arm to strike—an eye to pry into every native court of Hindustan, to watch the discontents and the broodings of the rulers, the heart-burnings of their subordinates. From watching and noting to fermenting and stirring up there is but one short step. Every court, every bazaar, in India, would note the

presence on the frontier, in a position not only unassailable, but becoming every day more and more capable of assailing, of a first-class power, the secret enemy of England, and professing the most unselfish anxiety to relieve them in their distress. An arm to strike, because a few years of intelligent rule would render the valley of the Hari Rud capable of supporting and equipping an army strong enough even to invade India.

“In a third sense, likewise, the possession of Herat by an enemy would be not less dangerous to England. The roads converging on it, already alluded to, are traversed by caravans to which no other route is available. We may be sure that the city which successfully resisted the rivalry of Meshed when Meshed was backed by all the influence of the Shahs of Persia, will take a still higher position when supported by the might either of England or of Russia. The European power, whose influence shall be paramount in Herat, will rule the markets of Central Asia. More even than that. The possession of Herat by Russia means the exclusion of England from the markets of Central Asia.”

The city stands on the right bank of the Hari Rud, from which water is brought by several channels. It is built in the form of a rectangle, the north and south faces being about 1,500, and the east and west faces 1,600 yards in length. Enclosing the city is an immense earthwork about 50 feet high, surmounted by a wall ranging from 25 to 30 feet; with a deep moat, which can be easily flooded from the Hari Rud. The citadel is situated in the centre of the city, and is also surrounded by a moat. There are five gates, of which one, however, is closed up, and each is flanked by two bastions. The city is bridged at each of the four gates by a wooden drawbridge, which is raised and lowered by mechanical appliances worked from inside the walls. Each face of the four walls is furnished with from 25 to 30 bastions.

On the exterior slope of the embankment, supporting the walls, are two lines of shelter trenches, one above the other, carried all round the city, except where the gates are. A correspondent with Lumsden's mission describes the mounted armament as some "twenty guns of varied calibres, besides numberless others lying dismounted on the ramparts." Twenty guns to defend $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles of wall! The garrison consists of 4,000 or 5,000 troops, exclusive of irregulars.

It may be mentioned that the Russians have complete plans of the fortifications, obtained by General Grodekoff in 1878.

The estimates of the population show considerable divergence. The first during the present century was Christie, who visited the place in 1809, and reckoned the population at 100,000. Burnes and Shakspeare called at Herat on their way north. Conolly was there in 1828-30, and gives 65,000 as the figure; while Pottinger, in 1837-8, states the number at about 40,000; and Ferrier, in 1845, estimated it as low as 22,000. Whether any of the numbers, or all of them, were correct is impossible to say; but since Herat is a rendezvous for the country people when threatened by the enemy, each estimate may be quite correct for the year stated. Later, in 1865, Pollock again gave 100,000; and in 1878 General Grodekoff thought the approximate number was close on 50,000. The latter figure is now generally accepted by geographers. Candahar has also 50,000 or 60,000 inhabitants. These are the only two towns lying between the Russians and India.

To most Englishmen Herat is associated with the brilliant defence of the city which Eldred Pottinger maintained in 1837 against a Persian army of 40,000 men and 60 guns, commanded by Muhamad Shah. A large number of Russian officers participated in the siege, and an entire Russian regiment. Pottinger, a young Bombay artillery officer, happened

to be exploring in the neighbourhood when they arrived, and persuading the Afghans to allow him to control the defence, maintained a desperate resistance of ten months, when the Persians retired. It may be noted that the Persians marched from the Caspian *viâ* Askabad and Meshed to Herat, by a road 550 miles long, running parallel with the one *viâ* Krasnovodsk and Askabad. This road was supposed to be the best highway of invasion to India, but Lessar's discovery of the easy section from Sarakhs to Herat proved the one now held by the Russians to be superior. As the Russians are almost certain before many years are past to absorb Khorassan, the second Transcaspian road will also come into their possession.

In 1881, when English people were still incredulous as to the practicability of a Russian invasion of India, I put forward this argument: that Persia, having in 1837 marched 35,000 troops and 50 guns (composed of 18 and 24-pounders) from the Caspian to Herat, and, in 1880, Ayoub Khan 30,000 troops and 30 guns from Herat to Candahar, to which point various English armies had advanced from the Indus with guns, therefore there was absolutely no physical obstacle to the marching of a powerful Russian force with heavy artillery all the way from the Caspian to India. The terrific mountain barrier many English politicians still believe in I asserted to be sheer moonshine. Since then this practicable line of invasion has been supplemented by the second that the Russians now hold, and of which I have said it is so flat and easy that one could drive a four-in-hand all the way to the outposts of Quetta. In the event of war, both routes would be used by Russia.

Since 1856, when Persia advanced a second time and took Herat, for which we went to war with her and made her retire, the Shah's power has been rapidly declining in Khorassan. A detachment of 2,000 or 3,000 Russian troops—

even less—planted at Astrabad and Shahrood would sever all communication between Teheran and the rotting, misgoverned Transcaspian province of Khorassan, and Russia could utilise its resources to the fullest extent for an attack upon Herat. Considering how imbecile and corrupt the Shah's rule is notoriously known to be, it has always seemed in my eyes an astounding piece of bad statesmanship that Lord Lytton should have entertained for one moment in 1879 the idea of severing Herat from Afghanistan, and confiding it to the care of Nassr-ed-din. One might as well have set a mouse to guard a piece of cat's-meat from a tabby.

In its present condition the fortress of Herat is admittedly not strong, and it would require a considerable amount of exertion on the part of the officers attached to Lumsden's mission to render it secure from a Russian attack. This admitted weakness has given rise to the remark more than once of late that, such being the case, we could hardly call it the Key of India.

But this contention, which is mainly put forward by men who have not taken the pains to read the arguments of Malleon and other authorities, or who, if they have, from lack of memory have forgotten them, will not bear serious examination one moment. A score of the ablest generals of the day, in Russia as well as in England, have declared Herat to be the Key of India. Do you think that they are likely to be wrong, because some mole-eyed man of peace has made the discovery that the defences of Herat are a little bit out of repair? Admit that they are; what then? Are the military resources of the Russian empire so meagre that, after the Tsar has seized the place, he cannot apply a few patches?

But the issue raised is a totally false one. Concentrating their gaze too much upon the town, men overlook the locality. What is the Key of India? On this point a deal of miscon-

ception prevails, which I have been doing my utmost to dispel for a long time.*

In England the impression is widespread that such English generals as MacGregor and Hamley, and such Russian commanders as Skobeleff and Kaufmann, have concurred in regarding Herat as the Key of India, solely because it is a great fortress, or because it may be made to be one. But these generals have always looked at Herat in a wider sense, as may be, indeed, almost inferred from the remarks I have quoted of Malleon.

Our generals and the generals of Russia value Herat, not solely on account of the city, but on account of the resources of the district in which it is situated—resources in corn and beef, which, if swept in to any point of the Herat district, not necessarily to Herat itself, would feed an army of at least 100,000 men, and sustain them during the final advance upon India. It is this great camping-ground, and not exclusively the town of Herat, that is the Key of India. If a line be drawn south of Herat 100 miles to Furrâh, a second west 70 miles to Kusan on the Persian frontier, and a third 120 miles north, behind the points occupied by the Russians, a rough idea may be formed of a district as fertile as England throughout, and possessing marvellous mineral resources. This is the camping-ground, this is the place of arms, which Russia wants, in order that she may be always able to threaten India. There is no such camping-ground anywhere between the Caspian and Herat, and none again between Herat and India. Hence, not without reason, have the ablest generals of

* Let me quote two instances. A correspondent of the *Times of India*, accompanying Ridgeway's force, wrote in November that the sight of the Herat fortifications disappointed him; now he had seen the place, he doubted whether it was really the Key of India. On the 6th of March, Sir George Campbell, speaking at a lecture I gave at the Royal Aquarium, also questioned its being the Key of India, because "the place is very weak, and could be easily taken by a European enemy."

England and Russia designated the district the Key of India.

General MacGregor put this plainly enough in his "*Kho-rassan*," in 1875:—"From the fort attached to the village I had a fine view of the valley of Herat, which stretched in every direction but the south, one sea of yellow fields and verdant trees. Without going further, it was easy to see the value of Herat to any power with intentions on India, and to recognise the justice of the dictum which termed it the gate of India. Just as in the minor operations of the capture of a city the wise commander will give his troops a breathe. on their gaining the outer defences, so must every general coming from the west rest his men awhile in this valley. And no better place could be found for this purpose; abundance of beautiful water, quantities of wheat and barley and rice, endless herds of cattle and sheep, good forage, and a fine climate—all combine to make the Herat valley the most apt. place for a halt before entering the desolate country between Furrah and Candahar."*

The significance of the recent Russian advance consists in this—that the Russians have established themselves inside the very limits of the Herat district; in other words, they have violated the integrity of the Key of India. Ak Robot, Pul-i-Khisti, &c., which Russia has seized, are inseparable

* MacGregor thus defined, in 1875, why Herat was the Key of India:—"Because it is the nearest and best point at which an invader could concentrate and prepare for an invasion of that country—advantages which it gains from its beautiful valley, the fertility of which is unrivalled in Asia; from its strategical position, which gives it the command of all the important roads to India; from the great strength of its fortress, it being, in fact, the strongest place from the Caspian to the Indus; from its admirable climate, and from the prestige it enjoys throughout Asia. The fertility of its valley, and its capability of maintaining large forces is proved by the fact that it has been besieged oftener than any other city in Asia, and has always afforded supplies for the armies of both besiegers and besieged. And, it must be remembered, the first have sometimes reached

parts of the Key of India. Penjdeh, which they claim, is absolutely essential to its security. These places are included within the fertile zone of Herat. The Russians have crossed the desert zone and established themselves upon it. They have settled down on the edge of the great camping ground I have described. Shall they remain there? That is the point which England has got to settle. If they do remain—if we resign to Russia the gates of Herat—the Alikhanoffs and the Komaroffs will soon possess themselves of the rest of the great camping-ground, and hold the Key of India.

Most unwarrantably, without provocation on the part of Englishmen or Afghans, Russia has intruded on the fertile zone of Herat. England is within her right in demanding that she shall clear off.

To excuse her seizure, she asserts the necessity for a scientific frontier, and contends that the one she proposes is in every respect as good for the Afghans as for herself. Let us see if that be the case.

Round about Sarakhs, on the Hari Rud, is a certain margin of very cultivable ground, broken by a stretch of less fertile or sterile ground, higher up the river towards Zulfikar. Up the Murghab another, but more thoroughly desert, district separates the Merv zone from Penjdeh. The Sarakhs zone and the Merv zone thus formed two excellent links in the chain of a fortified frontier, running from Askabad to Khoja

as many as 80,000 men, and have seldom fallen below 30,000; while both have always been composed of undisciplined men, who destroyed nearly as much as they consumed. Besides all the positive and patent advantages which the place itself possesses, Russia in Herat would have an unassailable position from which to threaten us in India, so as to compel us to keep large forces always ready to meet the menace, while she would be able to cast abroad throughout India that 'seething, festering, mass of disaffection, the seeds of a rebellion that would still further cripple us; she would altogether alienate from us the whole of the Afghans and the Persian Khorassanese, and would practically control for her own purposes nearly all their military resources."

Saleh, on the Oxus; and the line being that recognized by Russian diplomacy, ought to have been insisted upon as the frontier by the English Government.

As I understand, this was formally done, but in order not to restrict Russia to an arbitrary line, certain modifications were admitted to be possible. The very utmost limit of those concessions was Pul-i-Khatun, in the Hari Rud, and Sariyazi, on the Murghab. This would have effectually secured Russia all the country belonging to the Sarakhs and Merv districts, with perhaps a trifle beyond; but the security of Herat would not have been so grossly assailed as it is now.

This concession would not have altogether pleased England, for Pul-i-Khatun is a very important strategical point. It is only 80 miles from Meshed, and controls the roads leading thither from Central Asia. Established there, Russia secured a lodgment, so to say, in the Meshed district; and as her designs on that rich city are well known, such proximity was not desirable. It further meant bringing the Cossack 39 miles nearer the Key of India. Still, as I have said, for the sake of an amicable settlement, the country might have tolerated this concession.

But Russia was not content with this. She stepped across this Pul-i-Khatun-Sariyazi line, and traversing the country beyond seized a new line of her own, beginning at Zulfikar and running through Ak Robat to Pul-i-khisti. This new line was on purely Herati ground, and concentrating what I have to say upon it, I will show what this advanced position is, and how essential it is that Russia should be compelled to fall back to the line which the English Government was, as I imagine, prepared to cede to it.

On the map Herat is shown to have lying north of it a mountain range, called the Paropamisus Mountains, which shields the Herat valley, and is claimed by Russia to be an effectual barrier to the city. Russia knows that the English

public is slow in ridding itself of geographical errors, and she therefore talks plausibly of a "mountain barrier, with the passes in Afghan hands," as an admirable frontier for Herat. But this is a trifle. She audaciously puts forward as the spokesman of this pretension the very man who, three years ago, upset geography and the policy of Russia and England in Central Asia, by demonstrating that the Paropamisus was no barrier at all! That man was Lessar.

It is well known to politicians what a shock he administered to England in 1882, when he pushed on to Herat and found the Paropamisus, hitherto considered to be a mountain block 15,000 or 20,000 feet high, to be but hills 900 feet or so above the surrounding locality. Can one call a series of hills, three times the height of St. Paul's Cathedral, "a mountain barrier"? One might as well call Shooter's Hill Mont Blanc.

Let me quote an extract from the *Times* correspondent accompanying Sir Peter Lumsden, published March 12th. He says:—"You will see on the map that two branches of the Paropamisus run from Herat across Badgheis to the Hari Rud—one north-west (the Barkhut Hills), and the other west. In reality, only the former exists—the southern branch of the Paropamisus is a shadow, unless, indeed, it is represented by the gentle undulations of gravelly soil, covered with camel thorn and assafoetida, which intervene between the Herat valley and the latter. Thus melts away one of those stupendous natural obstacles to the invasion of Herat, among which optimist imaginations have hitherto gambolled so gaily."

Let us have this clear. Between the Russian position, stretching from Zulfikar to Pul-i-khisti, north of the Paropamisus, and the Herat valley south of it, there is only one "range." That range is full of passes, and on one of them (the Sar-i-Chashma) the correspondent stood, and he tells us

what he saw, gazing in the direction of the Russian position. "A striking panorama unfolded itself before us. A vast sea of grassy billowy downs swept to the foot of the Djam mountains in the far west, and to the north rolled away as far as the eye could see, its undulating surface being only broken by the island hills which enclose the valley of Penjdeh. This, then, was the bleak, sterile, mountainous country which we had thought of with a shiver, when our eyes, tired of staring, glaring deserts, were enjoying the rich fertility of the Herat valley. Mountainous—as mountainous as the Brighton Downs! Bleak—the climate of the Engadine in August! Sterile—groves of pistachio and mulberry trees, wild rose trees, real English blackberry bushes, wild carrots, testified to the richness of the soil, irrigated in many places by mountain streams of the purest water, alive with fish! And this was autumn, the eve of winter; what then must Badgheis be in spring? Why it should be named Badgheis ("windy") I know not, for since we have crossed the Sich Bubak we have been sheltered in its kindly bosom from the fierce biting blasts which never ceased to assail us from Seistan to Kusan. How it has obtained its reputation for sterility is not difficult to say. Scarcely an acre of this rich soil is cultivated; scarcely, I say, for a few acres to the north of the Chashma Sabz Pass are rudely tilled by a Turcoman, who acquainted us with his existence by rushing into our camp, and throwing himself on the ground with loud cries. It transpired that he was a servant of one Aziz Sirdar, an ex-Tekke chief of Merv, with whom he had fled from Merv when the Russian occupation was imminent. He had left his wife and children behind him, and was anxious that when we turned the Russians out of Merv we should restore them to him. As for Aziz Sirdar, he befriended the Ameer when he fled from Afghanistan and passed through Merv on his way to Khiva. When trouble befel Aziz Sirdar, and

he had to leave Merv, he appealed to the gratitude of Abdurrahman Khan, who had become Ameer of Afghanistan, and not in vain, for he was presented with a village in the Herat valley and with some land in Badgheis."

To speak, therefore, of a mountain barrier protecting Herat from the Russian outposts is nonsense. It is a series of downs, traversed by numerous roads, which are only of any difficulty in one or two instances in the section immediately north of Herat. But there is no reason why Russia should take these one or two difficult roads, when there are, as Lessar admits, a score of better ones further west, where an advance can be made more easily. It would be impossible for the Afghans to protect the whole length of the Paropamisus, and the closer, therefore, the Russians get to the downs the more quickly they will be able to step across them into the Herat valley. If they retain what they have, and secure what they claim, the Herat valley will be practically at their mercy.

The fertile country immediately north of the Paropamisus is known as Badgheis, and has always been treated as part and parcel of the district of Herat. It was once a populous, well-cultivated country, and now that the raids of the Merv Tekkes have ceased, tribesmen are flowing to it from all parts of Western Afghanistan. It has no natural connection with the Merv district, nor yet again with that of Sarakhs. On the other hand, there is an inseparable connection between Badgheis and the valley of Herat.

Standing on the summit of the Paropamisus, as the *Times* correspondent recently did, the observer would naturally divide Badgheis into two sections. Gazing down the slopes, he would have on the right hand the Kuskh-Murghab region, the objective of the Russian advance from Merv, and the Hari Rud region, the objective of that from Sarakhs. The latter Russia claims because the Salors pasture their flocks there; the former she demands with the Sariks. This is

what she calls her "ethnographical claim." She has annexed a number of the Turcoman tribes (in the case of Merv fraudulently), *therefore* she has a right to the rest. If they are not annexed, she says that the frontier will be in a state of constant tumult.

Now, let us see what these turbulent tribes really are. First, let us take the Salors, on whose behalf the Russians demand the Hari Rud section of Badgheis.

Once a great tribe, the Salors were shattered by the Persians in 1833 in punishment for their raids. After this they migrated for a time to the Murghab from Sarakhs, where they had been long established, and then settled at Zurabad, a district in Persia, on the west side of the Hari Rud, not far from Zulfikar. After a while they got tired of Zurabad, and returned to Sarakhs. Here the Tekkes fell upon them, seized their cattle and property, and carried the tribe off to Merv. This was in 1871. The tribe then numbered about 3,000 families.

These are facts taken from Petrusevitch's report, which is given in full in my "Merv." While O'Donovan was at Merv, in 1881, the Salors, with the consent of the Tekkes, took their departure. Their proper home was Old Sarakhs, but the Persians would not let them settle there, and made them pass on to Zurabad.

In 1882 Lessar paid them a visit and published a report, which is also given in full in my "Russians at Merv." He confirmed Petrusevitch's statements, and added that they were miserably poor. Altogether the whole Salor tribe did not number more than 4,000 families, of whom 2,000 only were at Zurabad; 1,000 were encamped with the Sariks on the Murghab (a number of whom appear to have subsequently migrated to Zurabad), 400 were on Russian soil at Tchardjui, 200 on Afghan soil at Maimene, and 100 at Pul-i-Salar, close to Herat.

On the 17th of December, 1884, Lessar delivered a lecture at St. Petersburg on Merv, which I have before me now, and in this he added to the foregoing: "The Salors are extremely poor; they have scarcely any tents; they live in reed huts; cattle they have scarcely any, and their principal occupation is agriculture."

Now we can smash into the lies that have gathered about the Russian claim. First let us put that claim in precise language. Russia demands the whole of the Hari Rud, or western half of Badgheis, including Pul-i-Khatun, Zulfikar, Nihalshini, and practically the whole country south of Sarakhs, to the Paropamisus, and east to Ak Robot, *because*, (1) the Salor tribe has from time immemorial pastured their herds there; (2) because the people cannot do without that pasture land; (3) and because the tribe is so turbulent that if it were not annexed there would be no peace on the frontier.

In reply, England, basing her rejoinder on Russian facts, can say this:—That the Salors belong to Old Sarakhs, and as that is their favourite district and home, and there is plenty of land there, thither they ought to return. That the fact of their having from time immemorial pastured their flocks in Badgheis is untrue, for it is only since 1881 that they have been dwelling at Zurabad, excluding a very brief interval twenty years ago. That they have hardly any cattle now, and therefore do not need the pasture lands. That they are so poor and shattered that they have not perpetrated a raid, or been guilty of turbulence, for nearly a quarter of a century. Finally, that they are not camped (at Zurabad) on Afghan soil at all, but on Persian, and cannot be held to have the slightest claim to the unoccupied Badgheis district east of the Hari Rud.

I might add that, so far as is known, the 2,000 or 3,000 miserable Salor peasants at Zurabad have displayed no desire to become Russian subjects. But even supposing they have

acquiesced, are we to surrender the whole of the west Badgheis district to Russia on that account, with Zulfikar and other gates of Herat? I say no; and if you, reader, say no with equal firmness, the Russians shall never retain them.

Parenthetically, but none the less seriously, let me point out a great and growing danger arising out of this claim to the Salor Turcomans. If Russia retains the West Badgheis district she will also annex, obviously, Zurabad, on the Persian side of the Hari Rud, and we have no knowledge as to how far that annexation may stretch. In all probability it will extend up to within a short distance of Meshed, because Petrusevitch, who first gave the hint to Russia to push the wedge from Sarakhs and Merv to Herat, urged also that the Persian frontier should be bulged in from the Hari Rud to the capital of Khorassan.*

Therefore, let it be clearly understood that if we yield Zulfikar and the western gates of Herat, we not only give Russia control over avenues within one hundred miles of the Key of India, but we also seal the fate of Meshed and the great Persian dependency of Khorassan—the golden country, the granary of Transcaspia.

On that account, when England is asked to surrender a “few miles of barren country” and a “mere bit of pasture land” on “ethnographical grounds,” it is well she should clearly realise what she is really asked to do.

No diplomatists, as she should surely know by this time, surpass those of Russia in the art of wrapping up mendacious claims in cotton wool.

Having disposed of the Hari Rud section of the Badgheis district, let us deal with the Murghab. The principal feeder of this river is the Kushk, which rises in the Paropamisus immediately north of Herat, within forty miles, and, flowing

* This is shown in several maps in my “Merv.”

parallel with the Hari Rud, joins the Murghab where Fort Ak Tepé controls the Penjdeh district.

The east section of Badgheis is claimed with the Sarik tribe and because of that tribe.

Now, I have already shown that the Penjdeh Sariks have never had any wish to be Russian subjects, that they hate the people of Merv, that they are naturally separated from them by a band of desert intersecting the Murghab, which the Russians have crossed ; that they have long been subjects of the Ameer, and that the lands they hold are Afghan lands. The Russians, therefore, have not the shadow of a claim to this section. The Sariks of Penjdeh number eight thousand families, and, although they were once great raiders—they were always fighting with the Merv Tekkes—they have become so tame since the Russians occupied Merv and the Afghans Ak Tepé, that the frontier is totally free from turbulence and crime. A correspondent writes from there that scarcely any carry arms ; that they are a happy, contented, hard-working people, and that English officers are able to ride about the country provided with no weapons for self-defence.

Russian writers have stated over and over again since 1881 that directly Russia suppressed the raids carried on by the Tekkes of Akhal, the people immediately subsided into hard-working peasants. The same has been the case with the Sariks at Penjdeh.

The contention, therefore, that Russia must annex the Sariks, to keep them quiet, is preposterous. What is really wanted is some one to annex the Russians, to keep *them* quiet. They are the "turbulent tribes" on the Afghan frontier.

The special correspondent of the *Daily News* writes from Penjdeh, Dec. 7, that he arrived there, expecting to find the Sariks savage monsters "There they were before us

working in their fields, peaceable, good-natured, and smiling fellows. We had seen them at work for some days back, and found them a simple, harmless people. . . . The chiefs of the Sariks have manifested the most friendly feelings towards us. They all express themselves as being most friendly, not only to the Ameer, but also to the British Government."

Now, since the eight thousand Sarik families at Penjdeh are quite content with Afghan rule, and are altogether averse to Russia, why should this country hand them over to the Tsar, on "ethnographical grounds," for the sake of a frontier which Russian officials candidly admit among themselves is only temporary? If our *prestige* had not fallen so low, such a monstrous demand would have never been made. Russia has not the slightest right to Penjdeh, and if Englishmen put themselves shoulder to shoulder at this crisis she shall never have it. But there is one thing which must not be lost sight of. In withholding Penjdeh from Russia, we must insist on the evacuation of Ak Robat and Pul-i-Khisti, the retention of which by Russia would render Penjdeh practically worthless.

It is between the Hari Rud and Kushk rivers that the salt lakes lie, which Russia claims with the Sarik Turcomans. If she has no right to the one she has none to the other. It is said that the tribesmen ruled by Russia cannot do without these lakes, but this is a wide and hazy pretension. There is any amount of salt in the Caspian region, and eastward of it towards Merv, thus securing Russia's Transcaspian subjects, while, as the Sariks of Penjdeh have been the principal users of those lakes, "the indispensable necessity" of Russia controlling them does not appear very apparent. The amount of salt used by the frontier tribesmen is extremely insignificant, and the fact that Russia should include the claim at all among her pretensions indicates how weak her case is.

Before dismissing Russia's demand for Penjdeh, a few particulars about the locality may not be out of place.

Ak Tepé is the controlling point of the Penjdeh district, and it was there that the Afghans built a fort when they occupied the Sarik locality last year. It is situated on a huge mound, (hence its name "White Hill") on a piece of flat alluvial ground, round which the Murghab passes in a winding course before joining the Kushk. The site is on the east, not on the west side of the Kushk river, as represented in some maps; hence, it will be seen, the fort not only controls the junction of the Kushk and the Murghab, but the whole country inside the two rivers up to the hills overlooking Herat. Fort Ak Tepé, with its seventeen guns, is thus in every sense a gate to Herat. That gate the Russians would have seized if the Afghans had not forestalled them. It is included within the territory demanded by Russia. The *Pall Mall Gazette* of March 5 thus described Fort Ak Tepé:—"The squabble about this trumpery little Afghan sentry-box placed in the middle of the Sariks, the *majority* of whom are under Russian authority, is simply grotesque." This is the pro-Russian way of putting the case. There are 4,000 Sariks under Russia, and 8,000 under the Ameer. The figures I take from Lessar's lecture delivered last year.

The Penjdeh settlements lie south of the fort, towards Herat, thickly disposed round the village of Penjdeh six miles from Ak Tepé, and afterwards stretching forty miles or so higher up the Murghab to within sight of the Afghan stronghold of Bala Murghab. When Russian statesmen speak of Penjdeh, they do not mean simply the village of that name, but the whole Sarik district, with Fort Ak Tepé. As that fort is the principal military point of the district, it would have saved some mistakes (?) if more prominence had been given to Ak Tepé and less to Penjdeh. Let me cite one of these "mistakes." To excuse the Russian advance, a

certain Radical paper declared that the Afghans had advanced thrice towards Merv—first from Herat to Penjdeh, second from Penjdeh to Ak Tepé, and third from Ak Tepé to Sariyazi! As a matter of fact, the Afghans have only made one advance. They planted themselves at Ak Tepé last year, and it was only to “feel” a rumoured Russian advance, after the seizure of Pul-i-Khatun, that they threw ahead the temporary Sariyazi picket that successfully heralded Alikhanoff’s raid, and saved Ak Tepé from a surprise.

Subsequently, however, the Russians seized Pul-i-khisti, or the Brick Bridge, a bridge of nine arches spanning the Kushk a few miles from Fort Ak Tepé, and leading to the entire Penjdeh district. Its retention would render the Afghan fort almost untenable. But this is not the worst. They claim Chaman-i-Bed, between thirty and forty miles up the Kushk, and have already seized Ak Robat, a place possessing an amazing supply of water between it and the Hari Rud at Zulfikar. If they be allowed to remain at Ak Robat they might just as well have Penjdeh, for they will be able to sever it from Herat at any moment. At Ak Robat they are within eighty miles of Herat. Penjdeh is variously stated to be from 100 to 140 miles from the Key of India. The Russians, thus, are a long way to the rear of the Afghans.

Penjdeh is not a simple oasis, like Merv, that can be dis-severed from Herat. The Sarik settlements stretch up to those of the Jemshidis, and the Jemshidis again practically up to Herat. One might as well assert that the French located at Canterbury would not endanger London, as that the Russians at Penjdeh would not be a menace to Herat.

The Jemshidis are very different from what they were when Vambéry trudged through their country to Herat. Even Grodekoff in 1878 spoke highly of them. Writing from the spot, the *Times* correspondent attached to Lumsden’s

force says of them:—"They resemble the Turcomans in dress and manners, but they are apparently a quiet, peaceable people. An English officer might safely live among them without any guard, and if they have only respite from raids and war they will doubtless spread over and multiply in the more healthy but deserted lands of Badgheis. They are hardy, clever horsemen, and every household breeds its own horses. When we were in Kushk the weekly fair was held; it was attended by many Turcomans from Penjdeh and by some Firuzkuhis, but by very few Hazaras, with whom the Jemshidis are not on very friendly terms. The Turcomans brought salt, rice, soap, carpets, horses, sheep, and found for sale in the bazaar ploughshares (of cast iron) and hatchets from Maimene; Russian and French loaf sugar, Austrian matches, also Bryant and May's, Meshed and Bokhara silk and cotton goods. The greater part of the latter was Russian, not English—let Manchester draw its own conclusion."

Kushk is the central point or capital of the Jemshidis, and it is situated on the Paropamisus, close to Herat. There are about 4,000 families in the place. Telegraphing from it some time ago the correspondent of the *Times of India* said: "The climate and temperature are delightful. The soil is capable of immense fertility, and could support a large population." Even forty years ago, Abbott, who traversed the Kushk valley, described it to be "highly susceptible of culture, and has been once well tilled."

If the Russians secure Penjdeh, they will have practically no obstruction up to Herat, except the Kushk Pass, which might be avoided in time of war, while in time of peace the intercourse existing between Penjdeh and the adjacent Afghan country would enable them to diffuse their influence far to the south of Herat. This intercourse is not to be lost sight of. The Sariks are not within the commercial orbit of Merv, but within that of Herat. It requires little imagination to

realize the advantage Russia would gain for intrigue if we allowed her to obtain the district.

On the Murghab itself Russia demands Marutchak, an old Afghan town twenty-eight miles above the settlement of Penjdeh, and eighteen from the Afghan fort of Bala Murghab. Marutchak, on the right or east bank of the Murghab, was anciently a large and prosperous town; "now," says Mr. Simpson, "it is nothing but ruins. The Afghans are at present placing it in a state of repair. The outer wall is only of mud, or sun-dried bricks, and is, in some parts, in a very decayed condition. Over these walls the top of the citadel may be seen. This is one of the old mounds, of which we have observed similar remains in this country. It measures about eighty by seventy yards on the top. The old walls and towers are now being put in a condition of defence. From this citadel there is a great ramp, which runs in a circular form, from the north-east corner to the south-east corner. It is most probably the old wall, inclosing what had been the town at one period; the ramp has much the appearance of being the remains of a mud wall which has crumbled down into dust. The Afghans are now repairing it all round, so as to make it an enciente for barracks, so that it will accommodate troops. The outer wall, already described, is to be levelled, as being too large for the garrison which the Afghans can afford to keep in it. There are the remains of a few mud houses within the outer wall; but, with the exception of the Afghans employed on the fort, there are no inhabitants."

Bala Murghab is situated on the high road from Afghan Turkestan (Balkh, &c.) to Herat, and thus controls a Russian advance from that direction. The Ameer has recently located 1,000 Jemshidi families there, and is doing his best to make it a great stronghold. If, however, the Russians retain Pul-khisti, and secure Penjdeh, they will be able to sever Bala

Murghab from Herat, and the whole of Afghan Turkestan will lie open to them. In securing the eastern gates of Herat, therefore, Russia will obtain a basis for grasping, in turn, the whole of Ameer's dominions north of the Hindoo Koosh.

The occupation of West Badghejs is a menace to Meshed ; the occupation of East Badghejs a menace to Maimene, Balkh, and other outposts of Cabul. The occupation of the two districts jointly is a menace to the security of Herat. Thus the wedge which Russia has driven from Sarakhs and Merv to the gates of Herat opens up a vista of intrigue and annexation to her Komaroffs and Alikhanoffs, which must be to them and to her statesmen positively thrilling.

Hence the quarrel is something more than a mere squabble over an "Afghan sentry box." Without going into the wider issues, and confining ourselves to Herat, we might, to all practical purposes, allow the Russians to occupy the suburbs of Herat as let them remain where they are. All that would be necessary for Russia at any time would be to blockade Herat with a small force, and from her numerous new positions she could sweep up in a few days the whole of the resources that render Herat of value without taking the trouble to fire a shot at the city. Were the resource of the Key of India contained inside the city of Herat there would be some excuse for leaving the Russians at Ak Robat and other Afghan points, and contenting ourselves with replacing the mud walls with impregnable fortifications ; but, since the resources lie spread over the great camping ground I have described, stretching north and south of the Paropamisus Downs, England cannot but resent attempts to fasten a hold upon any part of it. To violate the integrity of one part of the Key of India is to impair the value of the whole of it. If we ought to fight for the whole we ought to fight for the part ; and, since Russia seems determined to follow up every

concession by making still more exacting demands, she really leaves us no other alternative than to resist her claims to the utmost.

England is most decidedly in the right, and Russia most decidedly in the wrong. It is better that we should fight her now, when she has only got 10,000 troops in the Transcaspian region, and has not thoroughly established herself in the Herat district, than give in now, and have to fight her next year, or the year after, when she has seized the whole of the camping-ground, and concentrated 100,000 troops upon it to drive us out of India.

CHAPTER VI.

SKOBELEFF'S PLAN FOR THE INVASION OF INDIA.

Skobelev's great aim in life—The solution of the Eastern Question on the Indian frontier—His plan for invading India in 1876—Adopted before the walls of Constantinople in 1878—Kaufmann's advance towards India—Great changes in Central Asia since—Were Skobelev alive, his plan would be totally different now—What it would probably be—Feasibility of the invasion of India from the point of view of various Russian generals.

“THE probability of our having to struggle for Herat, or to defend India from Candahar, is so remote, that its possibility is hardly worth considering.”

These words were penned by Sir Henry Norman, in a memorandum against the retention of Candahar, September 20th, 1880. They illustrate, in a plain and forcible manner, the view of the few, and now utterly discredited experts, who raised their voice in favour of the “scuttle” from Candahar, and invoked the spirit of faction to sanction it.

To-day England is not only morally struggling for Herat, but her Sikhs with Ridgeway at Penjdeh confront the Cossacks with Alikhanoff at Pul-i-khisti. At any moment shots may be fired, and then the troops that scuttled from Candahar will have to rush back “to defend India from it.”

On January 10th, 1881, the Duke of Argyll said, in denouncing Lord Salisbury's avowal of alarm at the advance of Skobelev to Geok Tepé: “We are told by the late Government that the danger they wished to guard against was the danger of a military basis to be formed by Russia on the Caspian. I hold that to be one of the wildest dreams ever entertained.”

In four short years the “wildest dream,” which, I should

point out, was simply the sober military opinion of Valentine Baker, Major Napier, and General Sir Charles MacGregor, who had surveyed the proposed line of advance—in four short years that “wildest dream” has become a practical reality, and the public read, quite as a matter of course, of Russia’s preparations for the invasion of India.

Whether the evacuation from Candahar was politic or not in 1881, one thing is certain. Down almost to the very last days of his Viceroyalty, the Marquis of Ripon refused to take serious steps to render the Afghan barrier a real bulwark to our Eastern Empire. The Cabinet in London moved somewhat with the times, but Lord Ripon and Sir Evelyn Baring resisted every change. It is a matter of common notoriety at Simla that the appeals of our greatest generals were pooh-poohed, and that to the very moment of the departure of the Baboo Viceroy from Bombay, the advice of heroes who would have to defend Afghanistan to-morrow, if attacked, was contemptuously rejected for the ear-whisperings of two or three insignificant men, of ignominious sentiments.

Why those generals—who, by the way, are now the chief advisers of Lord Ripon’s sagacious successor—should have been so uneasy during the last few years, will be apparent in the following pages.

Until the time of the arrival of the Stolietoff Embassy at Cabul, the idea of a Russian attack upon India was generally scouted in this country; and even those who urged the stemming of the Russian advance did not treat an expedition against us as a matter of the immediate present, but as belonging to the future. In Russia, military opinion was more advanced. While war was still undeclared against Turkey in 1876, and England was hoping that the conflict might be averted by peaceful diplomatic means, General Skobelev, then Governor of Ferghana, the Turkestan district nearest India, forwarded to Kaufmann an elaborate plan for a Central Asian

campaign. Even when summoned to Europe to take part in the operations there, he used his utmost influence at Court to put the Turkestan forces in motion, and finally achieved his object in sight of Constantinople, when, after several councils of war, it was decided that if the Congress at Berlin failed, an attack should be made upon India.

Accordingly, Colonels Stolietoff and Grodekoff left the camp for Central Asia, the former charged with a mission to Shere Ali, and the latter—Skobelev's oldest and most trusted friend—carrying Skobelev's secret plans, and for himself the special appointment as chief of Kaufmann's staff. One other agent was also sent from the camp—Pashino, an ex-diplomat, who had served as interpreter at Samarcand to the present Ameer, Abdurrahman Khan, and possessed a knowledge of India from a journey he had undertaken through the peninsula a few years earlier. His mission was to proceed to India and secretly ascertain the condition of military and tribal affairs on the frontier, and afterwards push his way through the Khyber and join the Russian mission at Cabul.

The outcome of the enterprise is well known. Kaufmann marched with the invading force to Djam, on the Bokharan frontier, and marched back again when the Treaty of Berlin became known. Stolietoff penetrated to Cabul, and occasioned the Afghan war. Grodekoff returned to Europe by a famous ride through Herat, and is now Acting-Governor of Turkestan. Finally, Pashino was arrested at Peshawur, and, in spite of his outcry, was sent back to Russia.

Most of these facts are known to the public, but Skobelev's proposed plan of operations has never received due attention, even at the hands of those commonly supposed to be interested in Central Asian affairs. Briefly, the plan was this. Kaufmann was to have led an army to Cabul, almost denuding Turkestan of its garrison, and was to have there organised the Afghan forces for an attack upon India, while

Russian emissaries stirred up the natives to a mutiny. If the people failed to respond to the Russian appeal, Kaufmann was to tie the English army to India by threatening it from Cabul, and, in the event of a rising, he was to push on to the frontier, and attack the English on one side while the mutineers advanced and harried them on the other. Supposing the attempt failed, Kaufmann was to retreat, not upon Turkestan, in case the sight of his shattered forces should cause Bokhara to rise, but upon Herat and the Caspian; being met on the way by a succouring army advancing *viâ* Askabad and Meshed.

Such was Skobelev's daring scheme, the revelation of which, since his death, has exercised a remarkable effect upon the imagination of Russian generals, and caused a longing to lead or participate in a campaign, offering so many chances of distinction and glory. Had the Congress of Berlin failed, the impression is general among Russian military men that Skobelev's plan would have been crowned with success. Their belief in the certainty of a mutiny in India is one that Englishmen will not generally share, and hence the probability of an actual irruption into India will be contested; but there is one matter upon which not much difference of opinion can prevail. The Afghans would have doubtless fallen in with the Russian plans, and by their co-operation tied the English troops to the frontier; thereby preventing the reinforcements being sent to Europe. This alone would have been a success of no mean order, for it is no secret that Russia was greatly disturbed by the idea of Sepoys being dispatched to Turkey to assist in the defence of Constantinople.

Strangely enough, Skobelev's plan of invasion has only excited Russia and England since his death. The actual march by Kaufmann towards India provoked little or no attention in this country, and, the details being suppressed in Russia, it was treated as a simple demonstration intended

to give weight to Stolietoff's mission. That it was really a serious move, inspired by the deadliest intentions against our rule in India, was only to the most limited degree realised **even** by the ablest politicians in this country. The military movement was looked upon as subsidiary to the political mission at Cabul, instead of the latter being, as it really was, a pioneering feeler of the former. This indifference to Kaufmann's march was increased by the English disasters in Afghanistan and Lomakin's failure to conquer the Turcomans. It was asserted that while the Afghan and Turcoman barriers existed India was perfectly safe from attack. Then stress was laid upon the Hindoo Kooshi, and politicians overlooked the looming advance from the Caspian. Even Skobelev's decisive success at Geok Tepé did not shake the belief of the Gladstone Cabinet in the sound and permanent character of the barriers beyond, intervening between Askabad and India. The Duke of Argyll said that the new advance was not to be compared with the older ones, and that we had nothing to fear from Skobelev's triumph. But for the energy displayed by Lord Salisbury, the fall back from Candahar would have been followed by the evacuation of Quetta.

It was while things were in this condition that Mr. Joseph Cowen, M.P., asked me to proceed to St. Petersburg to ascertain the Russian view of the position in Central Asia from the lips of the principal generals and statesmen. Of all the generals I saw, Soboleff was the only one who would agree with the opinion I strongly held at the time, and which was well known to them, that a Russian attack could be made upon India from the Caspian. General Skobelev was the most incredulous of all. He would not hear of a Russian attack. "The Central Asian difficulty is all humbug," he said. "I do not think a Russian invasion of India would be feasible. I do not understand military men in England

writing in the *Army and Navy Gazette*, which I take in and read, of a Russian invasion of India. I should not like to be commander of such an expedition. The difficulties would be enormous. To subjugate Akhal we had only 5,000 men, and needed 20,000 camels. To get that transport we had to send to Orenburg, to Khiva, to Bokhara, and to Mangishlak for animals. The trouble was enormous. To invade India we should need 150,000 troops—60,000 to enter India with and 90,000 to guard the communications. If 5,000 men needed 20,000 camels, what must 150,000 need! And where could we get the transport? We should require vast supplies, for Afghanistan is a poor country, and could not feed 60,000 men; and we should have to fight the Afghans as well as you. If we bribed one Sirdar, you would bribe another; if we offered one rouble, you would offer two; if we offered two, you would offer five—you could beat us in this. No; the Afghans would fight us as readily as they fought you. I believe the new frontier is quite permanent, and that we shall hear no more about Central Asia for many years to come.”

“But in regard to the possibility of invading India, General Soboleff expressed to me a clear conviction that Russia could march an army on India if she chose.”

“That was diplomacy,” replied Skobelev. “Of course it is possible—all things are possible to a good general—but I should not like to undertake the task, and I do not think Russia would. Of course, if you enraged Russia—if, by your policy, you excited her—if you made her wild—that is the word—we might attempt it, even in spite of all the difficulties. For my part, I would only make a demonstration against India, but I would fight you at Herat.” He said this with great animation, but very good-humouredly. “Do you know, I was very much interested during your war whether you would occupy Herat or not. It would have

been a mistake if you had done so. It would be difficult to march an army from the Caspian to Herat to fight you there, but we should be tempted to do it in the event of a war." *

Whether these were really the sentiments of Skobelev at the moment, or whether he was purposely minimising the possibility of attacking India, in order that England might not be terrified into preparing against it in time, is a matter over which much argument might be expended without leading to any satisfactory result. I will not attempt to discuss the point. I will simply point out one or two facts, which are of more importance at the present moment.

After Skobelev had finished his conversation with me he repeated it to Captain Masloff, one of his favourite officers. Masloff published an account of it in the *Novoe Vremya* which tallied with my own, and he subsequently told me that Skobelev had spoken of my report as perfectly accurate. The part I have repeated in this book was triumphantly quoted by Madame de Novikoff (otherwise O. K.), two years ago as demonstrating the madness of the Russian scare in this country. But O. K. has never said since that these utterances of Skobelev fell completely flat in Russia. No Russian newspaper, and no Russian military writer has ever reciprocated those views, or, indeed, ever noticed them at all. On the other hand, Skobelev's opposite opinions in favour of an expedition to India, which began to appear a few months after his death and have been seeing the light at intervals since, have exercised an enormous influence on the Russian military mind. Many of the documents published were written anterior to his conversation with me, but while the latter is ignored and forgotten, the former are incessantly being cited in proof of what Russia can effect against India.

Several other circumstances have contributed to add to the

* "The Russian advance towards India," page 105.

effect of Skobelev's aggressive views. A few months after his death General Soboleff published his "Anglo-Afghan Conflict," a bulky three-volume work, compiled by the Chief of the Asiatic branch of the General Staff before proceeding to Bulgaria as Minister of War. This work was a sort of official history of our Afghan campaign, based on English sources, and was recommended by the General Staff as a standard work for military libraries. His recent utterances in the *Russ* have shown that General Soboleff looks at things through very peculiar spectacles. He is dominated by the bitterest hatred against England, and believes everything said or written to her disadvantage. In this history he sought to make out, or, it would be better to say, did make out, to his own satisfaction, that the Afghan war was too large an enterprise for us, that we were defeated by the Afghans throughout the campaign instead of being mostly victors, and that we were compelled at last to withdraw owing to the damage inflicted on our prestige and the fear of a rising in India.*

An English reviewer, noticing Soboleff's work, said it was made up of "lies and nonsense." Upon him, of course, the work made no favourable impression, and he was disposed to minimise its importance. But, as a matter of fact, the book exercised an influence which is displayed pretty clearly to-day. To Russian officers who had not studied the subject, or who had only derived their impressions of the war from the jaundiced statements in the Russian press, the book appeared as worthy of credence as any official work could possibly be. It had been compiled by the Chief of the Asiatic branch of the General Staff, whose express duty it was to watch the war on behalf of the Government and obtain

* A translation of all that is essential in this work is given in "The Russians at Merv and Herat." London: W. H. Allen & Co.; 1883.

all possible information from England—perhaps India—bearing upon it. If such an official did not know what he was writing about, who in Russia was more competent than he? Thus Soboleff's book was eagerly read and widely read, and strengthened to a remarkable degree the feeling already prevailing that we were a very weak military power, and only maintained our hold on India by a miracle.

Skobelev's opinion that we could be expelled from the peninsula by means of a hard blow struck in front, simultaneously with a fomented mutiny at the rear of the Indus, has excited more and more attention as Russia has approached nearer our outposts. The belief in its feasibility that has steadily developed in Russia, since his plan of 1876 became known in 1883, has received a considerable impulse from the disappearance of the physical obstacles already existing. Skobelev's main argument against the feasibility of an invasion, when he discussed the subject with me, was the difficulty of transport, but this is a difficulty that has been daily wearing away ever since. When he proceeded to Geok Tepé in 1880 it took nearly a month for the troops of the Caucasus army to march from Tiflis to the Caspian to join. By the opening of the Tiflis-Baku railway, since his death, the journey can now be done between sunrise and sunset. When he ferried those troops across the Caspian he had to contend with a very limited marine. By the development of the Baku petroleum industry fifty powerful steamers, 150 to 250 feet long, have been added during the last few years to the shipping of the Caspian, and can now convey the largest conceivable army across the sea to Krasnovodsk. The Transcaspian railway, again, was not finished to Kizil Arvat until long after he left Geok Tepé. It is now being pushed on to Askabad, and Lessar has stated that whether there be peace or war, it will be continued to Sarakhs—within six marches of the Key of India. Finally, Skobelev imagined, or said he imagined, a

difficult road to exist between Askabad and Herat. Lessar has since discovered that it is one of the easiest in Asia.

Thus, by Russia's resolute destruction of the Turcoman barrier, and by the rapid disappearance of a series of obstacles, things have come to this pass—that a land march upon India to-day is an enterprise less difficult to the Russian military mind than the march upon Constantinople in 1877.

Such an enterprise might take two forms. Either Russia might adopt Skobelev's idea of a fomented mutiny, and advance with merely sufficient troops to cleave a passage through the Afghan barrier, or she might ignore for the moment the people of India, and push on with some such army of mammoth proportions as she employed in the last Russo-Turkish war.

Let me deal with the former first.

At the outset I must point out that a wide difference of opinion exists between English politicians and Russians as to the possibility of a mutiny in India, and that this deserves more attention than light-hearted publicists in this country are disposed to give it. English politicians generally assume that India is safe, or sufficiently safe, from the danger of another mutiny. Disturbances, it is admitted, might arise on the Russian approach, but the country generally would stand by us. I do not say that all politicians share this optimistic view, but the majority do—or, at any rate, they conceal their uneasiness and keep it from the public.

Now Russian generals, and the entire Russian Press, incline to a totally different opinion. General Skobelev, General Sobolev, General Tchernayeff, General Kaufmann, General Grodekoff, General Annenkoff, General Petrusevitch, and others less known, may be cited as eminent representative Russian military men who never entertained a doubt on the subject. I have discussed the Anglo-Russian conflict with many

Russian officers—some of them personal friends of mine—but have never met one who differed from them in this matter. Yet some have made a special study of India. Skobelev was always purchasing English books on the country, and I question whether there are half-a-dozen Members of Parliament who have such a good collection of English and foreign books on India as I have pulled about in the library of General Annenkoff.

If we examine more closely the plans of Skobelev and others, we shall see how important this factor of a general rising really is. Skobelev put the wants of Russia in a neat, compact form the other day when he declared that "Russia does not want India: she wants the Bosphorus." The Russian invasion of India is commonly ridiculed by certain Radicals on the ground of the hugeness of the enterprise. They assert that the people would never exchange English for Russian masters, and that it would require a larger army than ever Russia could spare to occupy and hold the country. But such assertions are based not upon facts, but illusions. Russia does not propose to occupy and hold India. I have never met a Russian who proposed—at any rate, for the present—such a difficult enterprise as that. Russia does not aim at replacing our administration by her own. None of the Russian generals ever suggested saddling their country with such a burden. What Skobelev really planned and advocated was, that the 250,000,000 people should be encouraged and helped to throw the 100,000 English off their backs, and that, during the universal collapse of our supremacy throughout the world that would ensue (in his opinion), Russia should occupy Constantinople.

Such an enterprise is quite a small affair, compared with the undertaking imagined by those Radicals I have referred to. To secure its success, supposing India to be ready to rise and throw us off, all that is needed is to march to Candahar a

force sufficiently strong to overcome the English force holding the frontier; after which the Princes and the mutinous Sepoys themselves could be left to deal with the small garrisons located on the plains and plateaux of India, aided, perhaps, by a few Russian officers. When Skobelev proposed his plan in 1876, the Russian outposts were too far from the Indian frontier, and the communications connecting them with Russia proper too extended and ill-developed, to allow of more than a small force being sent to attack India. He, therefore had to rely upon Afghan help on the one hand, and an Indian mutiny on the other.

It is well to notice that he provided for two kinds of assistance in his plan.* If the Afghan co-operation had been slight, he would have stimulated a general rising in India. If, on the other hand, he had considered himself sufficiently strong, with Afghan help, to break through the frontier, he would have only "manipulated the disaffected elements in India to Russia's advantage." The possibility of a general rising in India may be questioned by English politicians; but there is not one who can deny that "disaffected elements" do exist in the country.

The genuine belief of Russia in the probability of a mutiny in India on the approach of a small force against us, is too serious a factor in politics to be brusquely treated as an illusion. The more feasible a Russian attack upon our rule in India appears to the Russian Government, the less disposed will it be to treat us with diplomatic deference in Europe, and refrain from aggressive acts in Asia. Further, the greater the chances seem to it of a successful campaign on the Indian frontier than in Europe, the stronger the impulse to break through the Afghan frontier at any cost and secure Herat.

* I may state that his plans are given in full in "The Region of the Eternal Fire." London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1884.

What would Russia care for the Ameer's ill will at seizing Herat if she were sure of an Indian mutiny? The more, therefore, she relies on an Indian revolt the less she may be expected to care for Afghan susceptibilities.

Russia, in a word, has two cards to play—the Afghans and people of India. If she finds she cannot accomplish her aims with the one, she will try to effect them with the other.

“England lays a heavy hand on her dependent peoples,” wrote General Soboleff in the *Russ* last January, when he was already aware that Russia had seized the approaches to Herat. “She reduces them to a state of slavery, only that English trade may profit and Englishmen grow rich. The deaths of millions in India from starvation have been caused indirectly by English despotism. And then the Press of England disseminates far and wide the idea of Russia being a country of barbarians. Thousands of natives in India only await Russia's crusade of deliverance !

“If Englishmen would only throw aside their misplaced pride, and study a little deeper the foundation of Russia's rule in Central Asia, comparing it with their own, they would soon see plainly why the name of Russia has such *présti*ge in Asia, and why the natives of India hate the dominion of England, and set their hopes of freedom upon Russia. Russia gives full liberty to native manners, and not only does not overburden her subjects with fresh taxes, but even allows them exemptions and privileges of a most extensive character, England, on the contrary, is a vampire, sucking the last drop of blood out of India.

“As to our course of antagonism in Asia, England herself threw down the glove at Sebastopol, and if the Russian flag now floats over Merv, the English have themselves to blame. We accepted their challenge, it now rests with them whether there is to be a Russian invasion of India or not. But we hope

the time has come when English strategists will take into consideration the 200,000 troops of the Caucasus, and the 100,000 in reserve of Turkestan and Western Siberia, besides another army of half a million behind in European Russia, and will look on the map and see what must happen if a Russian corps of 200,000 men, accompanied by another of 100,000 of splendid irregular cavalry, pass through Herat and Balah into India, and proclaim the independence of the native population. Let England think well of the consequence of Russia deciding to take up arms against her."

By ignorant or interested writers these threats were represented as merely the casual frantic outpourings of a headstrong and harmless general. But it is well there should be no misconception on this score. Soboleff is an officer of very considerable weight and standing in Russia, and what he said represents fairly the feeling of the whole army and the greater part of the press at the present moment.

All the more reason, therefore, why we should cling to our hold upon Herat, and insist on a settlement of the frontier dispute before Russia masses a force at its gates capable of crushing Lumsden and his Afghan allies.

Let us now consider the second form an attack upon India might take—*i.e.*, a blow delivered by a large army instead of by a relatively small force, and operating without reliance upon a simultaneous rising on the part of the Indian people.

It is no secret that the Government are perfectly aware that Russia could dispatch a very strong expedition to the gates of Herat, and that the calculations as to what she could really do have been scientifically worked out by the ablest English military authorities, in a manner very alarming to those who hold the reins of power in this country. Soboleff's sneering suggestion that English strategists should take into consideration what Russia could accomplish from her Caspian base, in the event of war, has already been anticipated by our

generals. They demonstrated, before even Merv was annexed and the gates of Herat were won, that Russia could in 77 days mass 23,000 troops at Herat, and in six weeks afterwards at least as many more, while in from 70 to 100 days she could put 13,000 men into Cabul, and in 90 days push 11,000 more into the northern passes of India. Without counting the latter, we may therefore say that before even the last two advances took place in Central Asia, from Askabad to Merv and from Merv to the Paropamisus approaches, our military authorities knew that in less than four months Russia could mass nearly 50,000 men—all Russian troops—on the camping-ground of the Key of India.

A year ago, before these calculations became bruited abroad, I drew attention, in a pamphlet,* to the facility with which Russia, *viâ* the Volga and the Caspian base, could thrust a large army along the Askabad-Herat route to confront us at Candahar, in the event of European complications. Fresh evidence has accumulated since of the aggressive strength of this line of operations, and it may be that events will practically test it before long.

The Russian army, on a peace footing, numbers between 800,000 and 900,000 men. In time of war two or three millions may be summoned under the flag. Every year nearly 300,000 recruits are drafted into the army.

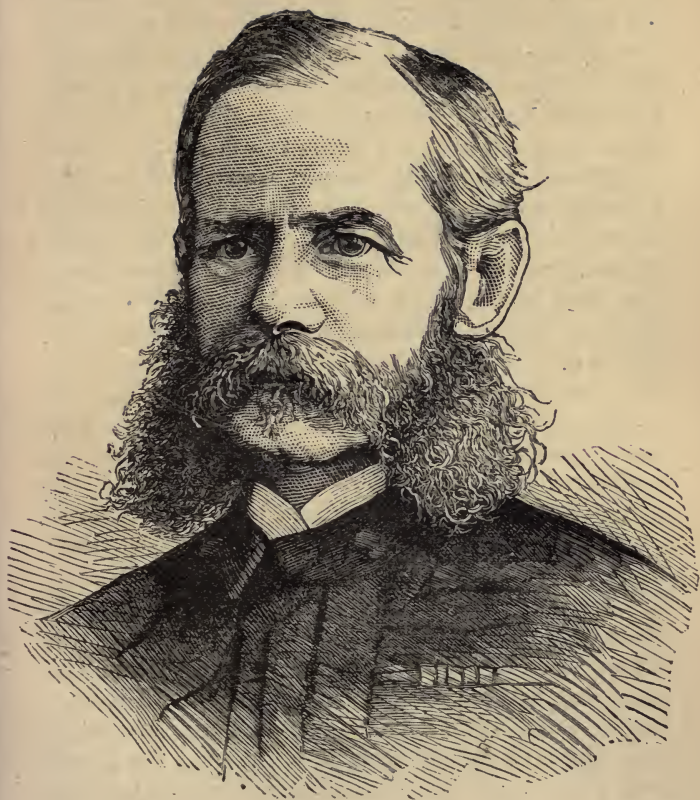
Moscow and the contiguous provinces are generally regarded as constituting the heart of Russia. If one will take a map, he will see that the distance is no further from this centre of strength to Krasnovodsk, on the Caspian, than to Constantinople. In 1877-8 Russia despatched nearly half a million men, with an enormous quantity of stores, in the direction of the latter place. To-day it would be as easy, or rather, easier, to deflect that number upon the Caspian.

* "Russia's power of seizing Herat and concentrating a force to threaten India." London; W. H. Allen and Co., 1884.

Most of the troops sent to the Balkan peninsula, in 1877, proceeded by rail, and it is well known that half of Russia's difficulties arose from the restricted character of this means of communication. But the Volga and its tributaries drain the heart of Russia I have referred to, and constitute a magnificent waterway to the Caspian Sea.

Although frequently described by travellers, the grandeur of this Volga waterway has never been properly appreciated by English politicians. Within a few short hours' railway ride from St. Petersburg, the Volga can be touched at a navigable point, and from there troops can go in steamers or barges down the Caspian Sea. From the Caspian Sea runs the easy level road from Michaelovsk (near Krasnovodsk) *viâ* Askabad and Sarakhs, to the gates of Herat and to India.

The resources of the Volga may be gathered from the fact that the traffic on the river amounts to over ten million tons annually, conducted by 650 cargo steamers and 3,000 barges, having the united capacity of nearly 3,000,000 tons. The value of these steamers and barges is estimated at £8,000,000 sterling. In excess of the 3,000 permanent barges of 1,000 tons capacity each, there are hundreds of temporary ones constructed to convey cargoes to Nijni Novgorod, or other destinations, and then broken up. On the Volga and Kama 100 such barges are yearly constructed, with a cargo capacity each of from 300 to 500 tons, and 200 with a capacity of from 5,000 to 8,000 tons. These huge vessels, the size of ocean-going steamers, and the 300-foot permanent barges, are too large to pass through the canal system to the River Neva, the locks of which do not admit the passage of craft exceeding in length 147 feet; hence 1,000 smaller barges, 100 feet long, and having a capacity of 200 or 300 tons apiece, are yearly constructed simply for the transport of goods from the Volga to the Neva. Besides the extensive shipbuilding above referred to, 4,000 barges, wherries, and fishing boats



GENERAL SIR F. S. ROBERTS, V.C., K.C.B

are annually built on the Volga for the lower course of the river and the Caspian. The central point of the traffic on the Volga is Nijni Novgorod, where there is an annual turnover at the Great Fair of from twenty to twenty-five millions sterling. Astrakhan, at the mouth, does a trade of £5,000,000 a year. The traffic passing through the mouth of the Volga amounted to a million tons in 1882.

These are some of the transport resources of the River Volga, down which Russia is dispatching troops to reinforce Komaroff's army at the gates of Herat. Besides the navigable waterway from Tver, the railway system touches the river at four great points—Nijni Novgorod, Samara, Saratoff, and Tsaritzin. To each of these, troops could be dispatched from Middle and Western Russia, and, on their arrival at the river, find plenty of transport to carry them down to the sea.

That sea—the Caspian—associated in most Englishmen's minds with sand and scorpions, is now a great basin of busy commerce. Over 200,000,000 herrings are caught in it every year. The petroleum trade of Baku, opposite Michaelovsk, employs fifty large steamers and hundreds of sailing vessels. Seven thousand vessels enter and leave the port every year. The port of Baku contains pier accommodation for 100 steamers at one and the same time, while the petroleum refineries give the means of drawing largely upon engineering resources. Without experiencing anything like the difficulty she encountered in 1877, Russia could assemble in the magnificent harbour of Baku an army quite as large as she invaded Turkey with then. It would have better transport, the troops would arrive at the base in better trim, and they would have the enormous food supply of the Volga to sustain them in their campaign.

The Army of the Caucasus, 100,000 strong on a peace footing, is for the most part concentrated in Transcaucasia. Through Transcaucasia runs a railway from Batoum, on the Black Sea, to this same Baku on the Caspian. Baku, there-

fore, would serve as the concentrating point of the forces of the Caucasus as well as those from Russia proper.

Baku, which in 1879 only contained 15,000 people, now has a population of 50,000, and is becoming a great city, There are 5,000 houses in the place and 1,500 shops, and 200 oil refineries turning out a quarter of a million tons of burning oil every year.

Across the water to Michaelovsk is a day's journey ; then comes the railway trip to Kizil Arvat terminus, 144 miles inland, where the Transcaspian desert ends, and the fertile country commences, running all the way to Herat. As I have said, the transport power of the Caspian is now such that Russia could rapidly move, not simply thousands of troops, but tens of thousands ; for the fifty steamers are new and large, and the hundreds of sailing vessels ships of great capacity.

We may therefore say, that so far as the collection of troops and stores in the Caspian is concerned, Russia could surpass any efforts we could make on the Quetta side of India. But there is another great fact. This assembly could go on secretly, and almost without our knowledge—at least, definite information could be suppressed,—while we could not move a soldier from England without the circumstance being known to Russia. Further, while not a soldier could get to India without the liability of being attacked on the way, for Russia might be able to secure allies in Europe, she herself could assemble a vast army in the Caspian, behind the screen of the Caucasus, without having to detach a single man to protect it.

In 1877 Kishineff was the concentrating point from which Russia invaded Turkey. For her troops to proceed to that point, the difficulties of transport and food supply were infinitely greater than they would be from the present terminal point of the Transcaspian railway system at Kizil Arvat. I say present terminal point, because although her engineers have

been engaged extending the line since last autumn, nothing is known as to the amount of new railway now open for traffic. Now, from Kishineff to Constantinople, the troops of the Shipka column had to march 750 miles, and of the Sophia column, 970 miles. If we treat Kizil Arvat as a Kishineff, the distance thence to Herat is only 523 miles, as compared with the distances traversed by the Russians in 1877, given above. But perhaps an objection may be raised to treating Kizil Arvat as a Kishineff—then start from the decks of the transports in the Caspian. The distance even then is only 667 miles, as compared with the 1,000 miles many Russians trudged on foot before they got to Constantinople.

And mark this difference. Russia, in invading Turkey, had Austria to threaten her flank. There would be no such enemy in the Caspian. Russia, further, had to cross the Danube—one of the largest rivers in Europe—in face of the Turks. She had to encounter large armies at Plevna, and traverse the almost impregnable Balkan range, meeting, on the other side, armies again before she got to Constantinople. In the case of Herat, nothing of the kind exists. There is not a single river of any magnitude the whole distance from the Caspian to Herat. There is no mountain range—only the Paropamisus Downs, containing, according to Gospodin Lesar, at least twenty good crossings. And instead of great armies, the Russians would find no enemy at all the whole way to their present outposts, and could now utilize the 50,000 Turcoman irregular horse to assist them in their undertaking.

Thus the defence of Herat, in the face of such odds, is a very serious matter. It is no permanent advantage to us that the forces at present in the Transcaspian region should be relatively small, compared with the larger invading army I have referred to. Said a Russian general to me, during a conversation at Moscow during the Coronation festivities, "We have now such a good road to the heart of Afghanistan, and the communications with the Caspian base, and from the

Caspian base to Askabad, are so perfect, and admit of such a ready movement of troops, that we need only a handful of men to garrison the Turcoman region. It is cheaper to maintain 50,000 men in the Tiflis district than at Geok Tepé and Askabad; and we can throw them from the one point to the other at a moment's notice."

Had Skobelev been alive to-day, his plan for the invasion of India would have undoubtedly been the massing, on a large scale, of troops in the Caspian basin, and their dispatch to Herat *viâ* the Askabad-Sarakhs road and the parallel one from Astrabad *viâ* Meshed. The second is the old highway of invasion, and runs through the richest districts of Khorassan. On reaching the Hari Rud at Kusan, the Astrabad column would march to the south of Herat, leaving on its left flank the Paropamisus hills, and sever the Afghan fortress from India.

It must not be forgotten that the Russians at Pul-i-Khatun and Zulfikar have only to make three marches to the west, and the occupation of Meshed would provide them at a stroke with resources in transport, food, and supplies generally, equal to those at Herat. Such an occupation might be made by arrangement with the Shah, who is notoriously anti-English, or without it; for if war arose, Russia would not hesitate a moment to cut off Khorassan from Persia at Shahrood, and use the Golden province as a line of advance and base of operations.

Hence the invasion of India, or the smaller operation of an attack on Herat, is an enterprise which seems perfectly feasible to Russian military men, and it is the conviction that the conflict would end in their favour that renders the Russian seizure of the gates of Herat so ominous. If Russia had not felt that she could safely affront this country, she would have never moved a Cossack across the Sarakhs-Khoja-Saleh boundary to the northern pasture lands of the Key of India.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RUSSIAN RAILWAY TO HERAT AND INDIA.

The advance of the Russian locomotive—Immense changes it will occasion in Central Asia—Inevitable junction of the Indian and European railway systems *via* Candahar and Herat—Only £4,000,000 needed to complete the link—Charing Cross to India in nine days—Statistics of the line.

A VERY great factor in the Russo-Indian question is the Transcaspian railway, which is sanctioned for construction as far as Askabad, and, according to Russian reports, is to be afterwards continued to Sarakhs. If we allow the Russians to maintain their hold on the gates of Herat, and ourselves subsequently retire from safeguarding the fortress with English officers and troops, it will be always possible, after the place has been carried by a *coup de main*, for Russia to connect it with her railway system in a few months. The menace to India would then be perfect.

To a correspondent of the *Cologne Gazette* Lessar is reported to have said as follows, the second week in March ¹⁸⁸⁵:—"People attribute to us the idea of continuing the Transcaspian railway from Askabad to Sarakhs and Herat—a two-fold absurdity. I have studied those regions in all directions and am convinced that a line to Herat by Merv must follow the course of the Murghab, for a desert railway must, if possible, keep close to water. From a technical standpoint the railway from Merv to Herat would be easy, for there is a gentle rise, and the chain of mountains, or rather hills, called the Paropamisus, has at least 20 good passes, and its loftiest peak is not 1,000 mètres high. During the Russo-Turkish war I took part in laying down the much more difficult line from Bender to Galatz, and I believe the line from Merv to Herat would

scarcely take more than three weeks. I should, however, be the last to recommend such a line. What we require in Central Asia is a line going from Askabad to Merv, and thence north-eastwards to Bokhara, so as to connect the markets together, facilitate the exchange of products, and open up new outlets for our Russian industry. When once we were at Herat with our line, the connexion with the Indian lines at Quetta would only be a question of time, and then farewell to our dreams of our Central Asian culture and industry. Manchester and Birmingham would soon find their way by Quetta and Herat to Merv, glutting the Bokharan markets with their cheap goods, and we should see that we had merely laboured for the English. The line to Herat, held up as a bugbear in the English newspapers, is only an imaginary evil for the English, but a real one for us Russians, for so far from implying the entrance of the Russians into India, it would rather imply the entrance of English goods into the Central Asian markets, and no military advantages could guard us against this economic danger."

In interviewing, unless the interviewer knows a little of the subject he is discussing, he is always sure to involve his "subject" in mistakes. Hence it would be unfair, in the present instance, to charge some of the above absurdities to Lessar himself. The interviewer implies that Lessar said that Russia had no idea of running the line to Sarakhs (as well as to Herat), and also puts the matter as though Lessar stated that the railway ought to run from Merv to Herat, not *viâ* Sarakhs. This, of course, is nonsense. What Lessar meant was that Russia, in pushing the line to Sarakhs and Merv, had no idea of extending it to Herat and India; and he was only saying what was commonplace when he told the interviewer that from Merv to Herat a line must follow the Murghab. Of course he would object to such a line, because it is not on the route to India: the railway ought to turn off

at Sarakhs to do that. As for its being possible to make a railway from Merv to Herat in three weeks, that was a statement Lessar could obviously never have made, for the construction of 240 miles of railway is not to be done by any human power at present existing at the rate of eleven or twelve miles a day.

I take notice of this interview at all, simply to point out one or two important facts which are not yet properly appreciated by the British public. In the first place, it is an established fact that cannot be in any way contested, that it *is* possible to construct a railway from Askabad to Herat, and thence to India. Secondly, it is equally beyond dispute that the two railway systems of Russia and India are pushing towards each other in such a manner, that unless one of them suspends the advance, they will be infallibly within a few short hundred miles of each other in a year or two's time. Further, that when this comes about, all that will be needed will be the construction of this short section to unite India with Europe by railway, and provide the world with a rival route to that *viâ* the Suez Canal. Finally, that as this new route will give Europe the means of getting to India in nine days or so, and India the means of returning the compliment, the traffic passing along the line through Afghanistan to India and back again will set up an amount of local progress and movement, altogether changing the conditions on the Afghan frontier.

Russia, who is the creator of this new route, and who is doing her best to enforce its opening up, is now posing as its opponent, so as to lull England until she seizes Herat. And she selects as the mouthpiece of this opposition the very man who has done more than anyone living to bring about the inevitable junction of the Indian and Russian railways!

Before describing the line, let me define what she is doing and what she is going to do. She is going to build the rail-

way as far as Sarakhs, for that is an admitted fact in Russia, and Lessar himself told me as much a few days after his arrival in London. From Sarakhs, however, she does not mean to push on to Herat or its gates, not because it is impossible or difficult, but because England would regard it as a menace. To allay our uneasiness on this score she says that she is going to turn off from Sarakhs to Merv, and afterwards extend the line to Turkestan. Therefore, she asks that we shall not be disturbed by any bugbear of a railway to Herat, but allow her to retain the gates of that place without fear of the locomotive pushing up thither.

It is well we should clearly appreciate the reasons of this attitude. She does not want us rendered more determined to dispossess her of the gates of Herat by the fears excited by the advance of her locomotive, and she does not desire that we ourselves should rush on our Quetta line to Candahar and the Key of India. In her view that would be a calamity. It would strengthen our defence of Herat too much. But it would not do for her to say this; therefore a commercial objection is trotted out, and she expresses a fear that if the two railway systems were joined England would deluge the markets of Central Asia with her cheap produce.

To my view, there is something delightfully audacious in this last contention. It is a well-known fact that every Russian advance means the exclusion of English goods from more markets in Central Asia, and that this is accomplished, not by the establishment of superior transport, but by the short and summary method of ordering our manufactures out of the country altogether. At present no English manufactured goods whatever are allowed to cross the Russian frontier in Central Asia from India; and the produce of India, such as tea, indigo, &c., is subjected to the heaviest duties. The fear expressed by Lessar, therefore, is grotesquely absurd. All that Russia would require to do, on the junction of the Russo-

Indian lines, would be to frame an edict and place a custom-house officer at the connecting point, and English commerce with the markets of Turkestan and Turkmenia would be effectually gripped and held in tether. Nobody knows this better than Russia herself.

On this account, we must not be lured into surrendering the gates of Herat, because Russia is *only* going to extend the Transcaspian railway to Sarakhs and Merv for the moment. As those two points form the bases of her present position, that simple extension alone would be a most serious matter; because Russia would have her railway system running to within 202 and 240 miles of Herat, while ours at Pishin would be 469 miles distant. It does not need much knowledge of military affairs to appreciate how great an advantage the Russian generals would possess over our own, if no corresponding movement were made by this country.

In this manner, the Russian railway advance provokes and compels the advance of the English locomotive into Afghanistan. This is a serious annoyance to Russia, for she wants to get as close to India as she can, and secure as much of the future highway as possible. She would like the junction to take place not further from India than, say, Candahar. She does not want England to push on the line to Herat, and thereby prevent her securing the Key of India. Hence the utmost efforts are being made to allay our fears, and prevent us, when the railway is finished to Pishin, from advancing for the moment any further.

"Don't talk about the Transcaspian railway," said Skobelev to me in 1882. "That's a fad of Annenkoff's. Nothing will ever come of it."

Yet it has been since revealed in Grodekoff's history of the Turcoman war, that Skobelev did attach an enormous value to the line, and took the deepest interest in its construction. He realised at the very outset how vastly it would

improve the Russian position at the gates of the Key of India.

The notion of a Transcaspian railway did not crop up until after Lomakin's defeat at Geok Tepé in 1879. But for that defeat, it is a question whether it would have been constructed at all. The disaster at Geok Tepé shook the power of Russia in Central Asia, and rendered a campaign of revenge unavoidable. The principal difficulty in the second expedition consisted in the scarcity East of the Caspian of transport animals, to convey the stores of the army across the narrow band of desert lying between the Caspian and Kizil Arvat. To overcome this, a service of traction engines and *fourgons* was projected by General Petrusevitch, and, later on, the construction of a tramway. Ultimately, at the suggestion of General Annenkoff, the Controller of Russian military transport, Skobelev decided on a regular railway, and induced the Government to send him the 100 miles of railway lying idle in store at Bender.

At first the railway works were meant to be only temporary, but Annenkoff conceiving the idea of some day earning for himself the reputation of a second Lesseps, by pushing on the line to India and giving the world a new route to the East, made the line so strong, that, when at last it was finished to Kizil Arvat, 144 miles from the Caspian, the five-foot metal way was as good as any in Russia.

On Annenkoff's return from the seat of war, he issued a pamphlet in support of his idea. This was exposed to a deal of ridicule in Russia, as well as in England; and not only did the Marquis of Hartington pooh-pooh the idea in the House of Commons, but even Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Richard Temple, and other so-called "alarmists" put it aside with disdain, as not entering the sphere of practical politics.

On myself, however, the pamphlet made a very different impression. So subversive of the condition of things in

Central Asia did it promise to be, in my estimation, that I published a pamphlet on the subject, with a *facsimile* of Annenkoff's map, and issued 1,000 copies to Parliament and the Press. In this pamphlet I demonstrated, by calculations based on Lessar's discoveries, that the extension of the line from Kizil Arvat to Herat would only cost Russia £2,192,000, while the complete junction of the Russian and Indian railway systems could be effected for a little over £6,000,000 sterling.*

Even this failed to move the lethargy of the Government, beyond causing the improvement of the Bolan route to be taken in hand, which, I have been informed, was due to this pamphlet; but in Russia it had the fact of dissipating much of the ridicule to which Annenkoff had been exposed by the Press, with which he was not popular, and when in 1883 the Transcaucasian railway was finished from Batoum on the Black Sea to Baku on the Caspian, it was at once seen how natural a continuation of this trade route Annenkoff's line was across the Caspian.

Still, nothing was done by England as a counterpoise until Merv was annexed. Then the government which had stopped the Candahar railway, and literally pitched a part of the line all over the country, gave orders for the same railway to be rushed on with all possible speed, and to be carried to the Pishin plateau beyond Quetta.

As soon as this order was given, Russia retorted by sanctioning the extension of her own line from Kizil Arvat to Askabad.

In this manner, even if the advance had not subsequently taken place to the gates of Herat, two further sections of the Russo-Indian railway would have been constructed all the same. Whether England will retort on the extension to

* "The Russian Railway to Herat and India." London, W. H. Allen and Co., 1882.

Askabad by a fresh advance on Candahar remains to be seen. The generality of English politicians assert that it will be absolutely essential if the Russian line be carried on to Sarakhs.

At the outset, let us see how the Russo-Indian line will stand if no further advances be made beyond those actually sanctioned—that is to say, as far as Askabad on the Russian side, and Pishin on the English,

	Miles.	Cost per mile.	Total.
Askabad to Sarakhs ...	185½ ...	£4,000 ...	£742,000
Sarakhs to Herat ...	{ 102½ ... 100 ... }	{ 4,000 ... 5,000 ... }	910,000
Askabad to Herat ...	<u>388 miles</u>	<u>£1,652,000</u>

The cost of the line is based upon the calculations of Annenkoff and Lessar. Between Askabad and Sarakhs, according to Lessar, the country is quite flat, and without a single obstacle to a railway. As regards the country from Sarakhs to Herat, Lessar, after his survey in 1882, divided it into two sections. A half, he said, would be as level as the Askabad-Sarakhs district, and the remaining half identical with the country commonly met with in Russia—that is to say, easy to traverse, but less easy than the rest, because of some hills and undulations. I have increased the cost of this by £1,000 a mile. I should say that no one has more insisted upon the feasibility of the line to Herat than Lessar himself, and it is he himself who has selected the Askabad-Sarakhs route as the best from the Caspian.

Thus, for less than the price of a couple of ironclads Russia could carry her railway system right into the very Key of India. Considering that she has just spent £9,000,000 in completing her railway communication between the Caspian and the Black Sea, this is a very insignificant outlay.

On the Indian side, when the Candahar railway was re-

commenced the terminal point was Sibi, 599 miles from Herat. The sanctioned extension to Pishin will carry the line to within 100 miles of Candahar, or 469 miles of the Key of India. Thus, if we go no further, Russia will be 81 miles nearer Herat with her locomotive than ourselves.

At £5,000 a mile, the estimated cost of the Candahar railway, the outlay on our section to Herat, 469 miles, would be £2,345,000, the country being more difficult between Candahar and Herat than between Askabad and Sarakhs. In this manner, when the sanctioned extensions are finished, all the expenditure that will be needed to establish through communication between Europe and India by railway will be less than £4,000,000 sterling.

	Miles.	Cost of Section.
Askabad to Herat	388	£1,652,000
Pishin to Herat	469	2,345,000
<hr/>		<hr/>
Total length and cost ...	857	£3,997,000
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Considering the revolution that would be accomplished by the possibility of proceeding from Charing Cross to India in nine days, this outlay is, relatively, an absurd trifle. If no political considerations hindered its accomplishment, a company might be formed and the money raised in London for the railway in a few hours.

At the present moment Russia is going to spend, in extending the Vladikavkaz railway to the Caspian and Black Sea, a sum of money nearly equal to that which I have given above as all that is needed to render it possible for English people to proceed to India in nine days. When this Vladikavkaz line is finished, it will still further improve the proposed line of communications. At present the route would be Calais, Berlin, Odessa, Batoum, Baku, Michaelovsk, Askabad, Herat, Candahar, and Pishin; the water breaks being—from Dover to Calais, Odessa to Batoum, and Baku to

Michaelovsk. When, however, the Vladikavkaz line is completed, the water breaks will be only two. The traveller will proceed direct from Calais to Petrovsk, on the Caspian, and cross over thence to Michaelovsk, thus saving the journey across the Black Sea. This Vladikavkaz-Petrovsk link will be completed next year, so that by the time the Afghan railway is open, the line of steam communication from London to Calcutta, *via* Herat, will be perfect throughout.

I have said that in Russia it is stated on the best authority that a decision has already been arrived at to push on the Transcaspian Railway, when finished to Askabad, still further, to Sarakhs. This has been practically confirmed by Lessar. Whether it will turn off then to Merv or not, we need not discuss. I do not believe it will. I am persuaded Russia will make a dash then for Herat. But let us simply accept Russia's admission that the line will cease advancing towards India when it attains Sarakhs. Even if she goes no further, one thing is already certain—England will inevitably push on her Pishin line to Candahar.

You may possibly think that events are not likely to be ripe for some time to come for a return to Candahar; but every hour they are tending to an English occupation of Herat, and, whether the communications be maintained through Candahar or not, the connection between Herat and Pishin will inevitably take the form of a railway. If Russia pushes on her locomotive to Sarakhs, to within 202 miles of Herat, it will not do for our locomotive to be 469 miles short of it. Public opinion will compel the Government to push on the Indian railway system to Candahar.

In that case, the position will be this:—

		Miles.		Total cost.
Sarakhs to Herat	202½	...	£910,000
Candahar to Herat	369	...	1,845,000
Total length and cost		571½	...	£2,755,000

Thus, whether Russia turns off afterwards to Merv or not, the extension of her railway system to Sarakhs will have the effect of reducing the gap between the railways of Europe and India to less than 600 miles. But I do not believe that the public would be satisfied with this state of affairs. Relatively the Russian locomotive would be far too close to Herat, and consequently our Candahar line would be pushed on absolutely to Herat. This done, the gap would be reduced to a paltry 200 miles, and there can be hardly a doubt that the moment a period of peace ensued the pressure of commerce would quickly bring about a junction.

Hence, I hold that in a very few years' time India and Europe will be joined together by a quick route of railway running through Herat, and the traffic speeding along it, even if it be only passenger, will revolutionize the Russo-Indian region, and efface the southern portion of the Afghan barrier.

If it be urged that I am too sanguine, I reply that the changes I prognosticate are nothing compared with what has been accomplished since 1880. Take Merv. It was then as mysterious as Timbuctoo, and common report affirmed that it was instant death for any European to penetrate to the haunt of the man-stealing Turcomans. To-day, the postman goes his rounds in the oasis, the policeman guards the shops in the bazaar, and a site is already staked off for a permanent telegraph office. Take Herat. Less than eighteen months ago no Englishman thought of the Sepoy and Cossack confronting each other on the Paropamisus slopes. Herat was as much out of the world, so far as European intercourse was concerned, as the Arctic region. To-day some of its gates are in the Postal Union, and a post-card can be sent by Lessar from London to Alikhanoff at Pul-i-khisti for a penny.

Strange as it may seem, the opening up of this short cut to India, on the importance of which I have been insisting for

years, without having produced much effect on the British public, is nothing more than a revival of a scheme that excited a mania in England 150 years ago. The Russians are only trying to do to-day what the English sought to accomplish in the reign of George II.

One hundred and fifty years ago the merchants of England were bitten with the idea of establishing trade relations with India *via* Russia and the Caspian Sea. The goods were to be conveyed to St. Petersburg or some other Baltic port; they were then to be sent by canal or road to the upper course of the Volga, and they were afterwards to float down the river 2000 miles in barges to its mouth. Here they were to be placed on ships and taken to Astrabad Bay, and from this point dispatched by caravan through Persia and Afghanistan to India.

If the conditions of trade and travel in Russia at the time could be adequately realised, people would be amazed at the wonderful enterprise of these merchants. In the Baltic there was constant war, the Volga swarmed with pirates, the Caspian was a Persian lake with rapine and disorder seething round its shores, and the whole of the country thence to India was as turbulent and untamed as the worst parts of Afghanistan to-day. Finally, in India itself, France was still the stronger power, and Clive had not commenced the career of conquest destined to convert the country into the magnificent dependency of the Empire we find it to-day. Such were a few of the conditions at the time the Russia Company sought to open up the Transcaspian route to India. In the interval that has elapsed the English, who only held a few points on the east coast of India (excluding the then insignificant port, without territory, of Bombay), have moved towards Europe from Calcutta to Quetta 2000 miles. The whole of this country they have conquered and organized, and railway communication runs right through it, or will do

so when the Pishin railway is finished. The Russians, on their part, whose final stronghold was Astrakhan, have advanced towards India as far as Ak Robat and other gates of Herat, or 1200 miles, the entire length of which is open to trade, and the greater portion traversed by steam communication.

In this manner, instead of the Russians at Astrakhan and the English at Calcutta being over 3,700 miles apart from one another, and exercising no control over the intervening country, as was the case when Jonas Hanway tried to push English goods to India 150 years ago, they are now, measuring from the Russian position at Ak Robat to the English at Pishin, only a little over 500 miles apart, while some of their soldiers face each other. Yet, forgetful of the past, and blind to the forces at work at the present, English statesmen for years have been acting as though the trumpery Afghan barrier were destined to last for centuries.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FUTURE OF THE AFGHAN BARRIER.

Impossibility of maintaining the Afghan barrier as it is—The Sepoy must confront the Cossack—The expansion of Russia—Will Russia let us garrison Herat?—Skobeleff's Afghan programme—England must herself organize the Afghan frontier, and man it with troops.

THE Tsar rules 100 million subjects; the Queen controls in India 250 millions. Between the two Empires lies the Afghan barrier.

What is the Afghan barrier? To the majority of Englishmen it is a vast mountainous region, extremely inaccessible, and peopled throughout with fierce tribes averse to any intercourse with the Feringhi. To conquer it would be a task equal to the Russian conquest of the Caucasus. To attempt commercial intercourse would be to expose England to the risk of having to perpetually avenge brutal murders. For Russia to try to march an army into any part of the Ameer's dominions would be to involve her in those disasters and losses which marked our last Afghan War. If given to strife among themselves, the people are welded together by a common feeling of patriotism against the attacks of outsiders. Irreclaimably cruel, they are best left alone; and even if Russia tore her way through the tribesmen, and broke the Ameer's levies, England could confront the wearied and mauled invaders in the Khyber and Bolan Passes, and effectually check an inrush into India.

Thus, to the view of most Englishmen, Afghanistan is a material as well as a moral barrier. To my view it is neither.

There is only one possible solution of the Central Asian Question. If the Russian advance is to be permanently arrested, we must confront the Cossack with the Sikh. Unless

we move up to Russia, Russia will move down upon India. There can be no permanent zone maintained between the two empires.

We shall see what a breakable barrier this Afghanistan is, if we look at a few plain facts plainly. All I ask, at the outset, is that you look at them with your own eyes, and not through the spectacles of 1842 or 1878; nor yet, again, through the lenses of political old fogeys, or, worse still, of mere party hacks, who, because they or their leaders expressed such and such opinions—five, ten, or twenty years ago—would rather see the Empire perish than change them:

The Russians are posted at the gates of Herat; the English are posted on the hills dominating the avenues to Candahar. Between them lies the Afghan barrier.

That barrier, physically, is of such a character, that the Russians could drive a four-in-hand from their own Cossack outposts to ours, and, during the 549 miles' ride, they would pass only two towns on the road—Herat with 50,000, and Candahar with 60,000 people. There are bad roads in Afghanistan, but they do not lie between the Russians and the English. There are fierce tribes, but they lie the thinnest between the Tsar's soldiers and the Queen's. There are patriotic Afghans, but the least sentimental, and the most amenable to European influence, lie between the Cossack and the Sikh. There are fearful mountains, but they do not lie along the road I mention. Horrible deserts exist, but in this case the most fertile parts of Afghanistan mark the route. In one word, there is no barrier at all between the Russians and the English, except such as we ourselves may try and create, and interpose to check the advance of the Cossack.

Let me put the matter more plainly in the shape of a parable.

A certain man stood at the junction of two roads: one, a level railway, along which, in the distance, could be seen a locomotive advancing, and the other a winding post road

which disappeared over a lofty hill. Seeing him standing on the metals, people shouted to the man to beware of the advancing train. But the man refused to look along the line; he kept his gaze fixed on the old post road, and replied, "I can see no stage-coach coming over the mountain; I don't believe in your warnings." And so he stood obstinately on the metals, refusing to move, until the train came up and cut him to pieces.

Such has been the attitude of England and her statesmen in regard to the Russian advance upon India. That advance was formerly through Orenburg and the deserts of Central Asia. When English statesmen looked in those days towards the advancing Cossack, they gazed at Cabul and the lofty Hindoo Koosh in its rear. There *was* a barrier then. But since 1869 the Russians have been advancing in another direction. They have been rattling along the almost level road from the Caspian to Candahar. Still, with woeful perversity, English statesmen have refused to divert their gaze from the old mountain road, and have kept looking at Cabul, when they ought to have been watching Herat. To-day, they are beginning to glance in the right direction, but unless they rid themselves of all the old-fashioned notions about the Afghans and the Afghan barrier, the Russians will smash their way into India.

In discussing the Russo-Indian question, politicians frequently quote the opinions expressed by Wellington in 1842, and by Lawrence and others in 1860-70, when Russia was conquering the deserts of Turkestan. They might just as well quote the Talmud. All the conditions have changed since those opinions were expressed; everything has been turned topsy-turvy in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the authorities cited for passing party purposes by shallow politicians would be the first to disown the erroneous application of those opinions if they were alive to-day.

To the Russian official or officer who has made the journey of 3,000 miles to get from St. Petersburg to the gates of Herat, what is the trumpery 549 miles of easy road intervening between him and the Pishin outposts? The Herat-Candahar region may be a barrier to politicians who have passed their lives in babble and barleycorn measurements, but to Russians, accustomed to think no more of a thousand miles' journey than the Londoner does of a 'bus ride to the Bank, the distance separating the Cossack from India is grotesquely insignificant.

The defect of the Afghan barrier is this—that it is weakest where it ought to be most strong; and we can only remedy that defect by taking the organization of the defence into our own hands. In plainer words, we ourselves must hold the gates of Herat.

All discussions about the return to Candahar are beside the mark. We can occupy Candahar whenever we like, and we need not concern ourselves about its security. The whole of our efforts must be concentrated upon the safeguarding of Herat.

We must make sure of the bulwarks of Afghanistan. The question of the inner defences can be settled at our leisure afterwards.

To hear some people talk, the installation of an Indian garrison at Herat would appear to be the most difficult task that has ever tested the resources of our Empire. As a matter of fact, an army concentrated at Pishin would simply have to march 400 odd miles to get to Herat, and that by a broad waggon road. To a nation that has just sent, in face of fearful obstacles, a force from Cairo to Khartoum (1,500 miles), such an expedition should be relatively a common place enterprise. Ten thousand Indian troops, aided by tribal levies, would be all that would be needed for the moment to safeguard the Key of India. The real difficulty

consists, not in getting those troops there, but in making sure that Russia will not issue an ultimatum forbidding their advance.

It may be opportune to repeat what transpired during a discussion I had with Professor Martens on the subject in 1882. The connection of Professor Martens with the Russian Foreign Office is well known, and some of his utterances appeared to me, at the time, so fraught with warning, that I printed them in italics. I give the conversation and my comment just as I published it in 1882,* and I think it will be found to possess significance of an undoubted character at the present moment.

The conversation was upon the future of Afghanistan. I mentioned that General Annenkoff had said, "Take Afghanistan, for sake of peace."

"But Professor Martens declared that England would not be able to annex Afghanistan *without Russia's permission*, or as he more delicately put it, 'without informing her first of her intentions;' *while as to Herat, he said that Russia would view an English occupation of the place with displeasure.*

"He would not allow that we enjoyed supremacy in Afghanistan; nor yet that we could regard it as a second Bokhara. He said Afghanistan was an independent state, and a neutral one; and, with reference to Lord Hartington's declaration last year, 'that England would not allow any Power to interfere with the internal and external affairs of Afghanistan,' which I quoted, to show what our Government thought of Russian pretensions, he said that the declaration was contrary to the views which Russia and England diplomatically expressed upon the matter, previous to the Marquis's speech. He would not agree that the Afghan war had can-

* "The Russian Advance towards India: Conversations with Russian Statesmen and Generals on the Central Asian Question." London: Sampson Low and Co., 1882, page 207.

celled those views. 'Herat,' he said, 'is quite as important to Russia as to England. If it is the Key of India it is also the Key of Central Asia. If we were there we could threaten you in India: if you were there you could threaten us in Central Asia.'

"This opinion was expressed also by Baron Jomini, one of the Under-Secretaries of State at the Russian Foreign Office, to Lord Dufferin in 1879. Writing on July 16th in that year, he states that Baron Jomini said to him: 'Although we don't intend to go to Merv, or to do anything which may be interpreted as a menace to England, you must not deceive yourself, for the result of our present proceedings' (*i.e.*, the operations of General Lazareff for conquering and annexing Akhal) '*will be to furnish us with a base of operations against England hereafter, should the British Government, by the occupation of Herat, threaten our present position in Central Asia.*'

"Professor Martens would not admit that Herat was as much a part of Afghanistan as Cabul or Candahar, and thought that Persia ought to have it. On my pointing out what a rotten State Persia was, and how completely it was under Russian control, he said that if Russia occupied Herat she would make Persia her enemy. My strong dissent from this led him to propose that Herat should be made into a sort of Switzerland, on the buffer state system, although he had previously expressed his disbelief in the possibility of keeping up Afghanistan as a buffer between the two empires. I held that such a project was impossible with Asiatics, but he continued to maintain that England should keep her hands off the place under any contingencies.

"As I gathered from him, he maintains Russia's right to annex all the territory up to the Afghan frontier, if the nomads provoke her to advance; he holds that Russia should also have Afghan Turkestan—*i.e.*, the country between the Oxus and the Hindoo Koosh. He considers that Herat ought

not to be treated as an Afghan possession, and, finally, he insists that the rest of Afghanistan should be looked upon as a neutral independent state, in the existence of which Russia has as much interest as England. It is needless to point out that these opinions cannot but be so many red rags to English Russophobists, and that, much as the Professor desires a reconciliation between England and Russia, a cessation of the Central Asian agitation is impossible while they are maintained. I myself would allow Russia to annex up to Afghanistan; but I would give her to understand that that country is English territory, and must not be looked upon as less our property than Mysore or Baroda.

"I used to think that the claims put forward by the *Golos* and *Novoc Vremya*, asserting Russia's right to treat Afghanistan as a neutral state, and Herat as apart from Afghanistan, were merely expressions of Anglophobe feeling. It has surprised me to find them seriously maintained by a person of such weight as Professor Martens."

Since Russia seized the gates of Herat, the St. Petersburg press has repeatedly intimated that she would not allow us to occupy and garrison the Key of India. These opinions have been treated somewhat heedlessly by the English press. They have regarded them simply as ravings of irresponsible journalists. But knowing what I do of the aims of Russian statesmen, and with the warnings of Professor Martens ringing in my ears, I cannot but think that the threats of the Russian press possess a very serious significance. In my mind I am persuaded, that if we allow this frontier complication to simmer until Russia masses at Sarakhs and Merv and the gates of Herat a more powerful army than Lumsden and the Afghans control for the defence of the Key of India, she will suddenly throw off the mask and deny our right to send a force thither. Hence, if there is to be any advance for the defence of Herat, it must be done without delay.

The present complications are something more than an obstinate controversy about a few miles of frontier. The conviction has been deepening in Russia for years that the economical depression to which it is a prey can only be dissipated by a solution of the Eastern Question, and that that solution is only attainable by taking up such a position on the Indian confines as shall compel England to acquiesce in the Russian occupation of Armenia and Constantinople.

Apparently, Russia has now accepted in full the policy of General Skobelev, which, published piecemeal since his death, has permeated the army and exercised an extraordinary effect in preparing Russia for fresh sacrifices. Let me quote what Skobelev wrote to a Russian diplomatist after his return from Geok Tepé, during a rest he was taking on his estate at Spasskoe Selo :—

“The Expedition of 1880-81, entrusted to me, gave birth to the indispensability of creating new relations with Merv, Afghanistan, and Persia. It rests beyond doubt that the late Emperor would not allow any other influence on the Persian frontier but that of Persia. Let us hope that those high ideals which lay at the foundation of the late Sovereign’s programme will remain the leading ones of the present policy. Up to now, our national misfortunes, according to our view, have mainly arisen, not from the breadth of our ideas, but from the irresolution and changeableness of our political and ideal aim of operations. This want of determination, hand in hand with financial unscrupulousness, has lain a heavy burden on the whole structure of the State. Personally, for me the whole Central Asian question is fully palpable and clear. If by the aid of it we do not decide in a comparatively short time to take in hand seriously the Eastern Question—that is, to dominate the Bosphorus—the fleece is not worth the tanning. Sooner or later, Russian statesmen will have to acknowledge that Russia must

rule the Bosphorus. That on this depends not only her greatness as a power of the first magnitude, but also her security in a defensive sense, and the corresponding development of her manufacturing centres and trade. Without a serious demonstration in the direction of India, in all probability on the side of Candahar, a war for the Balkan peninsula is not to be thought of. It is indispensable to maintain in Central Asia, *at the gates* of the corresponding theatre of war, a powerful body of troops, fully equipped and seriously mobilised. We might give up the whole of Central Asia in return for a serious and profitable alliance with England, until we had secured those results on the Bosphorus above mentioned, since the whole of Central Asia possesses for Russia only a temporary political significance. As a vestibule to the theatre of war in the event of sharp complications, similar to those of 1878, *the conquered Akhal country would serve in conjunction with the exclusive preponderating influence we enjoy in Persia.* With the pacification of the Akhal Tekke oasis, the widest field of action has opened before Russian influence in Afghanistan, whenever circumstances require it. Examining the strategical roads for the manifestation of this influence, in dependence on the results accruing to England from the Afghan war, we are bound to come to the conclusion that the principal line of operations will rest upon the newly-conquered oasis. The late Emperor, in appointing me commander against the Turcomans, was pleased to declare, in expressing an opinion as to what would be the results of a successful termination of the expedition, that he would not allow on the Persian confines any other preponderating influence except that of Russia. Remembering the sacred words of the Emperor, I hastened forward to Askabad and proposed that the Atak should be vassal to us, and Residents appointed at Meshed, Herat, and Merv; and finally, in drawing the frontier, I considered

as a *minimum* of our demands that we should control the mountain passes. . . . What has been said above by me does not constitute a new question, but luckily the success of the Akhal Tekke expedition practically opens to us the possibility of exercising an influence on the pliancy of Great Britain in the event of fresh complications arising from the Eastern Question. This affair, more than any other undertaking, demands knowledge and prolonged systematic preparations. In support of what I have stated, I am happy that I can quote an extract from the reports of Ellis, the English Ambassador at Teheran (the contemporary of Simonitch) to Lord Palmerston in 1835, now just published. 'I have arrived at the deep conviction that the British Government cannot in any case allow the extension of the dominion of Persia in the direction of Afghanistan without absolutely infringing the security of our Indian possessions. Persia either does not wish, or cannot enter into a lasting alliance with Great Britain. Our policy for the future ought consequently to be to regard Persia not as a rampart protecting India, but as a first parallel, from which at a given moment an invasion of India might proceed. Every step of Persia towards the East brings Russia closer to the gates of India.' Here is a revelation to us of political ideas, which ought to lie in the future at the foundation, and with which I was guided in all my operations, both military as well as those concerning the political frontier line of the newly subjugated country."

This was published in the *Novoe Vremya* last year, on the second anniversary of Skobelev's death. The gaps in the letter represent portions prudently suppressed by that paper. If it be carefully read, it will be found to possess fuller significance, and contain a more direct bearing on the present Russian advance and the present claims, than anything ever published in the Russian language, including the stale but often quoted will of Peter the Great.

“Russia does not want India; she wants the Bosphorus.” Such was the declaration of General Soboleff in the *Russ* a few months ago, and it will be seen that his words represent very neatly the views of Skobelev. The terms of peace seem simple, and there are certain simple-minded sentimentalists who are carried away by the plausibility of O. K. and urge that the British lion should lie down with the Russian bear and surrender Constantinople. But I think I shall be able to show that the offer is totally hollow, and one which cannot be accepted even by the most willing Russophile.

In the first place, not a single Russian writer has yet defined what the acquisition of “Constantinople” really means. Only one thing is certain—Russia does not mean Constantinople itself and nothing more. On the contrary, she wants the whole of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to give her a free and uncontrolled passage to the Mediterranean, and the amount of territory she would require with the channels she leaves open. Now, on the north side of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles is European Turkey, nearly as large as Great Britain, with 5,275,000 souls (we exclude East Roumelia and simply reckon the territory under the direct sway of the Porte); and on the south side is Turkey in Asia, larger than Germany, France, and Austria combined, with a population of 17,000,000. How much of this would Russia want? Because, having secured the Bosphorus, we know that she would require plenty of territory on both sides to protect it from attack.

As regards territory in Europe, Russia has expressed pretty plainly her desire to take over all that is left of the Porte’s dominions, while, in respect to Asia, it is considered essential that she should have Armenia, so as to connect Kars with the Bosphorus. Thus, although the 8,000,000 people in the immediate vicinity of the Bosphorus, and the 14,000,000 other subjects of the Sultan located further off do not ask for

Russian rule, England is requested to surrender the larger proportion of them, because Russia wants an outlet to the Mediterranean. On the same grounds, Denmark ought to be also surrendered, because the Danes control the exit from the Baltic. Nay, there is greater reason for this, because, while the annexation of Denmark would affect the interests of only 2,000,000 people, the annexation of Constantinople would interfere directly with the destinies of at least 8,000,000 people, and indirectly with 14,000,000 more. In a word, there can be no Russian acquisition of Constantinople that does not carry with it the annexation of a large proportion of the Sultan's territory, and it is well, therefore, that this should be clearly borne in mind by those who advocate a bargain between Russia and England.

But, supposing England did surrender Constantinople, would India be ever free from attack, as Soboleff implies? Could we safely leave the gates of Herat in Russia's hands? These are questions to which it is impossible to return an affirmative reply.

In the first place, Russia's guarantee, verbal or in writing, would be no guarantee whatever. To rely upon any diplomatic compact would be to put ourselves in a position as bad as that of the suburban policeman, who should hand over in a dark lane his truncheon and revolver to the captured burglar, in return for the scoundrel's assurance to go quietly to the station. It is not England's fault, but Russia's, that there is no guarantee Russia can give us which we can possibly respect. But even if we could place more reliance on Russian treaties, the expansion of Russia is a factor that would infallibly render them in time waste paper. Russia has a frontier line across Asia 5,000 miles in length, no single spot of which can be regarded as permanent. Starting from the Pacific we find that she hankers for the northern part of Corea, regards as undetermined by boundary with Manchuria and Mongolia,

regrets that she gave back Kuldja, hopes that she will some day have Kashgar, questions the Ameer's right to rule Afghan Turkestan, demands the gates of Herat, keeps open a great and growing complication with Persia about the Khorassan frontier, treats more and more every year the Shah as a dependent sovereign, discusses having some day a port in the Persian Gulf, and believes she will be the future mistress of the whole of Asia Minor. It may not be Russia's fault that her frontier is nowhere in a condition of rest. I will not discuss that point, but I do insist that the frontier is one which must expand in the future, and in so doing, frequently press on our interests. Consequently, the surrender of Constantinople would be of no avail in bringing about a permanent peace between the two countries, because there exist a score of other loopholes for quarrelling between them.

It is the recognition, the sorrowful recognition of this, that renders me such a resolute opponent of the Russian advance into Afghanistan. Were I convinced that the surrender of Constantinople would put an end to the conflict between the two Empires, I should be the strongest advocate of such a concession, for I like Russia. I have many sincere friends in the country. I take the deepest interest in its progress and expansion, and I should be the last to advocate war. But I recognise that permanent peace cannot be purchased by any surrender, and it is the consciousness that the concessions will only beget fresh demands that causes me to insist on the necessity for resisting to the utmost Russia's claim to the gates of Herat.

However disagreeable the task may be, England has but one course open to her. She must insist on the surrender of the Afghan points seized, and she must apply herself resolutely to the organisation of the new frontier. Fortunately, if the Afghan barrier lies open to Russia, it lies open equally to ourselves. The conditions at Herat are totally different

from those at Cabul. The people are almost devoid of fanaticism, they have a traditional feeling in our favour, and have already developed a fraternal sentiment since the presence of the Lumsden mission in their midst. Thus, if by friendly arrangement with the Ameer we could maintain a force in or near Herat, the measure would be very popular in the locality.

As regards the actual frontier the matter is still easier. Along the whole valley of Herat to Kusan, the people dwelling in the villages are quiet and well-disposed; north of them, to the Russian outposts, there are scarcely any inhabitants at all. Thus our outposts would be safe on the Hari Rud side of Herat. With regard to the Murghab, immediately north of Herat, are the Jemshidis. These I have already described as peaceful and friendly; so again are the Sarik Turcomans.

Now for Afghan Turkestan. From Bala Murghab to the Oxus the Uzbeks are described by Grodekoff as particularly peaceful—too much so, he thinks, as they thereby expose themselves to Afghan tyranny. The few Turcomans also found are likewise free from turbulence. In this manner a very slight Anglo-Afghan cordon would suffice to guard the frontier from Persia to the Oxus, and it would effectually check Russian designs on Balkh and other foreposts of the Hindoo Koosh, as well as screen Herat.

To the east of Herat are the Hazaras, and south-east the Amaks. These are supposed to number collectively 650,000 souls, and could supply 20,000 or 30,000 horse equal to the Turcomans. They are Mongols by stock, and so independent, that the Afghans have never been able to bring the former totally under subjection. With both, good relations have been established by Sir Peter Lumsden, and it is not anticipated by our Indian military experts that they would occasion any trouble, while, being a non-Afghan people, they would be a valuable support to our cordon, in the event of

any tumult among the Afghans themselves. The Firuzkuhis 30,000 in number, are another tribe that might render excellent assistance.

Thus, a cordon established along the new frontier would have powerful support in its rear, and from Herat to the Oxus would be safe from tribal attack and separated by the Hindoo Koosh from the tumults and fanaticism of Cabul. The sole difficulty is the linking of this cordon with our position at Quetta.

The first thing to be remembered is, that we are the practical proprietors of the whole of Beluchistan, the present Government having established a protectorate over it. It is very important to bear this in mind, because it gives us the means of establishing communication with Herat, without touching Candahar. As a matter of fact, the cordon I have referred to could be extended along the Perso-Afghan frontier to East Beluchistan, and there join hands with our own military forces. It has been pointed out by the highest authority that a railway to Herat is feasible from the port of Gwadur, on the coast of Beluchistan, and this could be carried up to the Key of India without meddling with Candahar, or traversing any country held in force by hostile tribes.

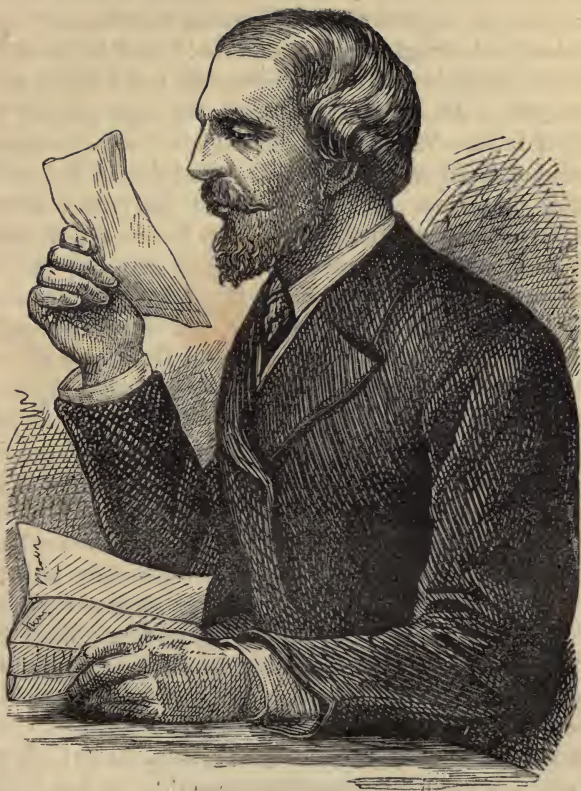
Before Sir Peter Lumsden left England I discussed with him this plan, which I had been maturing some time, and had only refrained from making public to prevent Russia taking timely steps to frustrate it. I based its success upon the tranquil character of the North-West and West Afghan frontiers, and my views on this point have since been confirmed by the correspondence despatched from that region to the English and Indian Press. Such a cordon would effectually check any further Russian advance, and it would leave untouched Cabul and Candahar, and the districts generally of Afghanistan where fanaticism abounds, and the ill-feeling engendered by the last war has not yet passed away.

Of late it has become known that some such plan had been drawn up by the ablest military authorities in India during the viceroyalty of the Marquis of Ripon. I cannot help thinking that England's power in India would have been stronger to-day, had he attended to this more, and left alone such fire-brand questions as the Ilbert Bill.

Still, it is not too late for its adoption, if it be taken in hand before Russia consolidates her position at the gates of Herat. If it be left untouched till then, Russia, I am persuaded, will never allow the English to garrison the North West Afghan frontier without making a determined effort to prevent it. On this account, it is essential that public opinion in this country should be perfectly ripe for the permanent manning of the Afghan frontier with Indian troops, and that Russia should feel that Earl Dufferin is backed up, if he adopts such a policy, by the patriotic feeling of the entire English empire.

I may add that our military resources in India are quite equal to the task, if increased by a few reinforcements from home, and that the sole obstacle is, whether the Government may not hold back, fearing that public opinion in England is not sufficiently advanced for such a forward movement. To go into full details of the policy would be to lengthen out a book already sufficiently long, and, what is worse, perhaps lead to Russian intrigue, in London and on the spot, to prevent its realisation. But I have said enough in this volume, in describing the new frontier, to indicate its feasibility; and India being ready to take the task in hand, in conjunction with the Ameer, I venture to express a hope that every reader will do his utmost to support the authorities at home and in India in accomplishing it.

With regard to Earl Dufferin, little fear need be entertained that he will prove unequal to the situation. The case, however, is different with the Government at home. Mr.



LORD DUFFERIN.

Gladstone's Cabinet is notoriously given to making concessions, and Russia, well aware of this, is resorting to every artifice to squeeze it. Against this evil tendency must be maintained a determined struggle. "No surrender!" must be the motto of every Englishman as regards Penjdeh, and "Hands off!" in respect to Ak Robat, Pul-i-Khisti, and other gates of the Key of India. Whether Russia shall win the great camping-ground of Herat or be permanently excluded from it, depends largely upon you. If you, as one of the public, do not manifest a fixed determination to keep Russia out of Herat and its gates, the Government will catch the spirit of your indifference, and Russia will succeed in realising her demands.

Let me make the appeal, therefore, that if you thoroughly appreciate the importance of preserving Herat, you will not simply content yourself with silent acquiescence. The press and the platform are open to you to give publicity to your support, and if you have means you can help in the dissemination of pamphlets to keep alive public feeling to the danger of the Russian advance. I have never rejected anyone's co-operation in the sacred task of safeguarding India from the menace from the North, and gratefully place on record the encouragement which has been given to my efforts by the sympathy conveyed to me by my readers. With your help I may be able to do more than I am doing; without it I remain just as determined as ever not to allow Russia to have Herat while my tongue and my pen can prevent it.

England has no aggressive aims in Central Asia; she has no desire to meddle with anybody beyond the Afghan border. Afghanistan itself she strongly wishes should remain independent, and to render it so she has been paying the Ameer a subsidy of £120,000 a year to consolidate his authority. With that independence I am as little disposed to meddle as any member of the Manchester school can be, but I hold that it can never be preserved by the simple process of

tossing £10,000 a month across our Indian frontier, and exercising no control over its expenditure. The Ameer, if a clever man in some respects, is not everywhere in his dominions popular sovereign, and only Englishmen who are ignorant of Afghan affairs, or refuse to watch them, can deny that there is only one step between his rule and anarchy. If he were to die to-morrow we have no guarantee that a period of turbulence would not prevail at Cabul, and Russia has pretty plainly informed us that if we do not maintain order throughout Afghanistan, she will not bind herself not to advance across the border to restore it. In other words, an outbreak at Herat would be a sufficient excuse for the occupation of the Key of India.

Again, if Englishmen are blind to the fact, Russia is not, that the tribal differences existing in Afghanistan render the country peculiarly well adapted for gradual disintegration. The notion of a united Afghanistan is fit only for the nursery. The Afghans are conquerors and foreigners in the whole of the country north of the Hindoo Koosh, from Balkh to Herat. Their control of Herat, as Russia is constantly reminding us, is quite of recent origin, and even yet they have not succeeded in imposing their rule over all the clans dwelling between Herat and Cabul. If Russia retains her present position, she will be admirably placed for intriguing with the non-Afghan peoples, and detaching them one by one from the Ameer's rule. The Jemshidis would be operated upon first, then the Uzbegs, afterwards the Hazaraks and Aimaks, and so on, with very little trouble. Unless we screen these tribes by an Indian cordon, Russia will be able to eat her way into the heart of Afghanistan.

The rampart of the Sulieman range is as much a delusion as the Paropamisus hills. It used to be thought that a great mountain barrier ran parallel with the Indus, and that it was only pierced by three or four cracks—the Khyber, Bolan, and Gomul passes. That myth was exploded during the last war,

a regular survey having disclosed the existence of 289 passes, every one capable of being traversed by camels. In the Dera Ismail Khan district alone there are 92 passes; and in excess of the 289 already mapped on the Indo-Afghan frontier, there are 75 more, leading from Beluchistan into India. To control all these passes in time of war, against an army located at Candahar, would be impossible. Among military men to-day there is no difference of opinion that we must go forward and take up a strong position to control the few roads debouching in the direction of this range. In other words we must assume charge of the Key of India.

England has to face this fact, and it is no use shirking it. If she does not pervade Afghanistan Russia will, and the weakest part of the barrier being precisely that which is closest to Komaroff and Alikhanoff, there is obviously every facility for the slow sapping intrigue, at which Russia is such an adept. We have already ourselves broken the isolation of Afghanistan by despatching officers and troops to Herat. Let us develop that intercourse, and upon it base the erection of such a barrier along the Russo-Afghan frontier, as will effectually secure Afghanistan from the corroding influence of Russia, and afford a means of consolidating our own. There need be no serious annexations, no meddling with the susceptibilities or power of Ameer or Afghan. Once such a defence is organised, in the Ameer's name, for the Key of India we can rapidly put in order India itself. But, it must be clearly understood, this can be done only by ousting Russia from the gates of Herat she has seized, and by peremptorily rejecting her demands for the remainder. Otherwise a wedge will have been successfully driven in from Merv and Sarakhs to the great camping ground of Herat, and it will require an enormous expenditure to defend the broken frontier from such treacherous *coups de main*, as the recent seizure of Merv and the dash to the bulwarks of the Key of India.

THE
RUSSO-AFGHAN QUESTION
AND THE
INVASION OF INDIA

BY
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"HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN," ETC.

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P R E F A C E.

RUSSIA has at last spoken ! After years patiently spent in absorbing the desert, she reached in 1884 the borders of the promised land. Her first act on arriving there was to object to the frontier which Lord Granville had proposed in October, 1872, which she, by the despatches of her Chancellor, dated respectively in December, 1872, and January, 1873, had accepted, and which in Russian and English maps alike has, ever since, been marked as the frontier. Yielding, in a weak moment, to an objection posed solely for the purpose of deriving some practical advantage from the re-opening of a settled question, Lord Granville arranged with Russia that Commissioners should be sent from both countries to the spot, to fix there the exact line of demarcation which was to be the limit of Russia's advance towards India. In consequence of this agreement an English Commissioner, of distinguished service in India, proceeded without delay to the point agreed upon. He found there the valleys, the rivers, the mountains, the people, but no Russian Commissioner ! The Russian Commissioner was, indeed, conspicuous by his absence, but, to counterbalance that absence, parties of Russian soldiers crossed the line which since 1872-73 had been accepted as the boundary of the country, and seized positions, useless for commercial, most important for strategical, purposes—positions which, since the year 1863, and even before that year, had paid tribute to Herát—the north-western province of the dominions of England's ally, the Amír of Afghánistán !

To show the necessity, if we wish still to hold India, of the retention, by an ally of England, of the positions Russia has seized ; to demonstrate the absolute right of the Amír to those positions, and the lawlessness of the act of Russia in seizing them ; to set clearly before the public the cherished ultimate

aim which prompted Russia to the conquest of the desert ; and to point out how the display of an iron resolution alone can avert from Herát and India the threatened danger, I have written the pages that follow. I have written them, not as a party man, but as an Englishman. Not as a party man, first, because, believing that the two great parties in the State have alike blundered, I have pointed out with impartiality the mistakes of both. Not as a party man, secondly and specially, because in a matter affecting the maintenance of an Empire the voice of patriotism should silence the selfish contentions of party. For, in very deed, it is an Empire which is now at stake, and it is by patriotic efforts alone that the splendid creation of our fathers and our fathers' fathers can be maintained.

The form in which this little book is published will make it accessible to all classes. It will tell those classes the truth, and, telling them the truth, will impose upon them a sacred duty. That duty is, above all things, to insist that the Ministers of England shall maintain, with respect to our Indian Empire, the old historical policy of England ; that the Ministers of England shall compel Russia to withdraw her unjust pretensions, to retire behind the frontier which she has violated. If the people of Great Britain fail to perform this duty, they will become partners in a policy, born of infirmity of purpose and cowardice, which will lose for us our Indian Empire !

In my outspoken criticisms I may have struck at cherished prejudices and wounded personal vanities. In dealing with a crisis which is partly the consequence of mistakes in the past, it was impossible absolutely to avoid doing this. But to those who may be affected by my criticisms, and to all, I would thus appeal, using the words of the greatest of English writers : "Who is here so base that would be a bondsman? If any, speak ; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Briton? If any, speak ; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak ; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply."

G. B. MALLESON.

27, WEST CROMWELL ROAD,
28 March, 1885.

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THE RUSSO-AFGHAN QUESTION.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—GEOGRAPHICAL AND STATISTICAL.

AFGHÁNISTÁN, the land of the Afgháns, is the borderland, the frontier bulwark, of the empire of the Mogols, as that empire was constituted when the earlier princes of that race ruled India. It is bordered on the east by the Panjáb, on the south by Balúchistán, on the west by Persian Khorásán and the desert of Baksu, on the north and north-west by a line drawn from Sarakhs, just above Robat-Abdullah Khán and Andkhoi, to Khoja Saleh on the Oxus, and from the latter to a point on its tributary the Koktcha, beyond Faizábád. Speaking roughly, the territory may be divided into five distinct parts; to the north-east, is Kábulistán or Afghánistán proper, the country of which Kábul is the capital, between the Hindu Kush to its north and Ghazni and the Saféd Koh to its south, and from the Khaibar Pass to the Koh-i-Baba; to the north of that again, sloping to the Oxus and its tributary, is Badakshan, with its dependent district of Vakhan, from the Sarikul on the east to the junction of the Koktcha river with the Oxus, the latter forming the northern boundary of this

Afghán province through its entire extent ; to the west of Badakshan, Afghán Turkistán, comprising the districts of Kunduz, Khulm, and Balkh ; further westward still, the districts of Aksha, Seripul, Maimené, Shibberjan, and Andkhai, the latter of which is the extreme Afghán frontier possession to the north-west ; to the west and south-west, Khorásán or Zabulistán, comprising Herát, the land of the upper Múrgháb, Gúrdistán, the Hazáreh mountain lands, the lands watered by the Helmund and the desert of Sëistán. The natural boundary to the north is the magnificent range of the Hindu Kush, sloping northwards towards the Oxus, which, in a military sense, forms its ditch. Separated from the Hindu Kush by the famous Bamián Pass, but continuing its course westward, rises the ever snow-bearing Koh-i-Baba, spouting from its southern slopes the water which forms the Helmund, which runs a course of about four hundred miles to the south-west. To this lofty range are linked on likewise, to the westward, two parallel ranges, the Saféd Koh and the Siah-Koh, which embrace the valley of the Heri-rúd. The first of these is equally well known as the Paropamisan range. Between Herát and Kábul, running southwards as far as the Argandáb, a tributary of the Helmund, the lofty peaks and chains of the Siah-Koh, separated from each other by streams issuing from its southern slopes, form the unexplored country of the Hazáreh. To the east, running almost directly north and south, is the great Sulaimán range, almost at right angles with the Saféd Koh, which strikes off from it westward at a point below Kábul. This Sulaimán range, which reaches as far as Balúchistán, forms a natural boundary between India and Persia. The stony, barren nature of the country as the mountain slopes to the latter, affords a striking contrast to the richness and fertility of the valleys on the Peshawar side. It is through

this range that the Kábul river, forcing its way, has formed the famous Khaibar Pass, the pass which forms the road of communication between Kábul and the Indian frontier. It offers likewise a mode of communication between Eastern Afghánistán and Sindh by means of the Gomal Pass. Between these two great ranges, the Sulaimán and the Paropamisan range, which almost inclose in a right angle the high lands of Afghánistán proper, there run in a diagonal direction, from the north-east to the south-west, several distinct mountain ranges, amongst which those which rise to the east of Kandahar are the most considerable. To these natural uprisings to the north-east, the depressions to the south-west form a complete contrast. Here, at a height of about 1,350 feet above the sea, is to be found the Hamun or Sēistan lake, from ten to thirty miles broad, and more than eighty miles long, surrounded by deserts, but showing many traces of former wealth and cultivation. Of the rivers, it may briefly be said that the largest, the Helmund, after running, as I have stated, a course of 400 miles, empties itself into the Sēistan lake, which receives also the waters of the Adraskan from the north, and of the Farrah-rud from the east. The principal tributaries of the Helmund are, the Argándáb, which rises in one of the ranges between Kábul and Kandahar, and flows in a south-westerly direction, and the Dori. The Kábul river pierces the mountains between Jellalabad and Pesháwar to increase the waters of the Indus.

The climate partakes the character of the country. The extreme cold of the high ranges runs parallel with the extreme heat of the valleys. There prevails in many parts likewise a medium climate, extremely pleasant, and very much resembling that of the highlands of South Africa. The country is rich in natural products. Iron and lead abound in all the mountain ranges, especially in the slopes

which enclose the valley of the Heri-rud : there, too, are to be found in abundance the willow, the poplar, the olive, maize, rice, saltpetre, and every variety of fruit. The fertility of that valley has caused the city which is its emporium to be styled the granary and garden of Central Asia. "We ascended," wrote Arthur Conolly from Herát, in 1831, "by one hundred and forty steps to the top of the highest minaret, and thence looked down upon the city, and the rich gardens and vineyards round and beyond it—a scene so varied and beautiful that I can imagine nothing like it, except, perhaps, in Italy." But, though the valley of the Heri-rud is the most fertile, it is not the only spot in Afghanistan favoured by nature. Vegetable products abound everywhere. Apples, apricots, figs, plums, and grapes are plentiful all over the country. The tobacco of Kandahar is famous. In the slopes in its vicinity coal, and more recently gold, have been discovered. Hemp, cotton, rhubarb, the castor-oil plant, orange trees, citrons, maize, roses, tulips, are likewise abundant.

To this brief outline of the country and its productions I must add a few lines regarding its people. The Afgháns, in this respect resembling the children of Israel, from whom they claim, though it is considered without sufficient reason, direct descent, are an aggregation of many distinct tribes, each of which possesses its own chief. Western Afghánistán is the headquarters of the Duranis—to which the family of the reigning Amír belongs—and the Ghilzais, the most numerous of all the tribes. To the east are the Berduranis, counting amongst them the Yussufzais, who have come mostly in contact with the British. Between these two principal divisions are smaller tribes, each with its own laws and its own characteristics. It is calculated that whilst the population of Kábulistán or Eastern

Afghánistán numbers 900,000; that of Sëistán 280,000; of Kimduz 400,00; of Khúlm 300,000; of Balkh and the city which has supplanted it, Takhtapúl, 64,000; of Andkhoi and Shibberjan 60,000; of Aksha 10,000; of Maimené 100,000; of Badakshan and Vakhan 300,000; that of the valley of the Heri-rud amounts to 1,170,000. It is worthy to be noted that the vast majority of these last are either pure Tadschicks (aboriginal inhabitants) or men of mixed Persian and Turki blood. But there are, likewise, the men of Hazáreh, numbering nearly 200,000, who are distinctly of Turanian origin; and the Kazilbáshis, pure Persians by descent, who number some 60,000. These constitute the Muhammadan population, and if we add to them 600,000 Hindus and Játs from India, who constitute the main industrial portion of the community, and a sprinkling of Armenians who belong to the same category, we shall obtain a very fair estimate of the actual number of the inhabitants.

The estimates regarding their character do not always agree. Mountstuart Elphinstone, whose insight into Asiatic character was remarkable, was probably right when he pronounced the Afghán to be a lover of liberty, brave, devoted to his family, true to his friends, but envious, avaricious, obstinate, and merciless. The best of all the tribes are the Duranis and Ghilzais. Originally shepherds, pasturing vast flocks in their native hills and valleys, these have preserved to a great extent their patriarchal customs. But however calm and stolid they may be ordinarily, it is a fact that they too, when roused, display to the full the worst qualities of the national character.

Of all the provinces acknowledging the rule of the Amir of Kábul Herát is the richest and most fertile. Important as is the part which it has already played in Central-Asian history, the future which is before it is more

important still. In this year, or in the years immediately following this year, the city of Herát will be constituted either the strong barrier which will stop the approach of Russia towards India ; or it will become the gate through which the Russian army, preceded by hordes of Turkoman cavalry, will attempt to follow in the steps of Alexander the Great, of Chengiz Khán, of Taimúr, of Nadir Sháh, and of Ahmad Sháh. To Herát, then, I propose to devote a separate chapter.



hands the key of that portal. When in the decay of their empire they lost that key, two invasions from the north speedily followed. The invaders destroyed and retired, but the destruction they effected so weakened the Mogol dynasty that it fell an easy prey to the first invader from beyond the seas.

But it was not the Mogols alone who recognized the importance of Herát as the outlying bulwark of India. With one solitary exception, that of Báber—to be presently noticed—every invader from the north has deemed the conquest of Herát as the first necessary preliminary to an attack upon India. So thought Alexander the Great (327 B.C.); so thought Chengiz Khán (1219–22 A.D.); so thought Taimur (1381 A.D.). In the time of Báber indeed Herát was the shuttlecock between the Persians and the Uzbeks, and Báber, who possessed Kábul, solved the question whilst they were fighting by cutting into the Herát line at Kandahar (1525–26 A.D.). At a later period, 1731, the conqueror of Persia, the Khorasáni Nadir Sháh, did not dare to dream even of the conquest of India until he had conquered both Herát and Kandahar. He did not grudge the four months which he found necessary to take the first, nor the thirteen required to subdue the opposition of the second. His successor in the career of conquest, Ahmad Sháh, a Durani Afghán, followed the same lines (1747–61); and, by his success, crushed the vitality out of the ruling dynasty of India. An Afghán, cherishing the snow-clad hills of his native country, he conquered, plundered, and retired. Under similiar circumstances, a European invader, who to gain a similar result should have traversed sandy deserts and crossed rocky steppes, would conquer—and remain !

The conquest of Délhi by Ahmad Sháh, May 1757 ; his

second occupation of the Imperial city the year following and the crowning victory of Pánipat (January 1761) dealt the reigning dynasty of India a blow under which it reeled and from which it never recovered. The very same year which saw the first conquest of Dihli witnessed likewise, on the plain of Plassey, a victory which planted the British firmly in Bengal. Whilst Ahmad Sháh retired, satiated with slaughter and with plunder, the British remained and pushed forward. The edifice of Mogol dominion was rotten to the core. It fell, less from the efforts of the British than from the decay which had sapped its foundations. Until 1857-8 India had never, in the true sense of the term, been conquered by the British. The natives of India who preferred the rule of law to the rule of anarchy and spoliation, had fought under the British banner for the principles which secured to them the possession of their own lands, the safety of their wives and children. Fighting on these lines,—the fight almost invariably forced upon them—the British advanced steadily till they reached the frontier line of the Sutlej. The country beyond that frontier line, the country of the Five Rivers, the Panjáb, was ruled at the time by one of the most astute sovereigns who has ever sat upon an eastern throne. But in 1836-7 Ranjit Singh was growing old. In the mountainous country beyond his northern frontier Dost Muhammad, a young ruler of the Baruckzye clan of the Duráni tribe, was rising into notice in the eastern world. Herát, which had not been heard of since Ahmad Sháh had sacked it, on the death of Nadir Sháh, in 1749, but which during the long period had been declining under the misrule and oppression of its foreign masters, came once more to be talked about. A Persian army, it was rumoured throughout the bazaars of India and Central Asia, was marching against

the capital of the fertile country watered by the Heri-rúd, and with that army, controlling its movements and instructing its soldiers, marched likewise many Russian officers and some hundreds of Russian soldiers. The rumour spreading onwards reached the Governor-General of India in Calcutta: it was passed on to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs in London. That minister recognized at a glance all its significance, all its importance. The name of that minister was Lord Palmerston!

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST CONNECTION BETWEEN ENGLAND AND HERÁT.

THE keen vision of Lord Palmerston had detected, I have said, at a glance, all the significance, all the importance of the news that a Persian army, guided and controlled by Russian officers, was marching on Herát; he had recognized that, should that march be successful, Herát would become a Persian Herát controlled by Russia. The armed intrigue must be met and baffled at all hazards.

The issues which were so quickly discerned by Lord Palmerston in London were not, unfortunately, so clear to the vision of the Governor-General of India and his Council. The most obvious method to accomplish the desired end would have been to lend efficient support to the ruler of Afghánistán. It was certain that Dost Muhammad desired as little as Lord Palmerston the occupation of the second city of his dominions by a Russo-Persian army.

That there existed difficulties in the way of a course so pointed is true. The greatest of these difficulties lay in the fact that whilst Dost Muhammad exercised supreme authority in Kábulistán, or eastern Afghánistán, his influence in Kandahar and Herát was little more than nominal. In the former his brothers held sway, and his brothers, jealous of his authority, were very much disposed to accept the Sháh of Persia as their suzerain: they had even made advances to Russia.

In Herát the position was still less favourable. There ruled Prince Kámran, son of the ex-Sháh of Afghánistán, Mahmud Sháh, a monster of wickedness and debauchery, virtually as an independent prince. He, too, disliked the idea of being conquered by Persia ; but he hated still more the prospect of being relieved by Dost Muhammad, for he had murdered the eldest brother of that chief, and efficient aid from such a source would mean death to himself.

Such, then, was the position, as it presented itself in 1837, to the Governor-General of India, Lord Auckland, and his advisers. It must be admitted that it was beset with difficulties ; for efficient aid to the ruler of Kábul, an aid sufficient to enable him to march to the relief of Herát, would throw at once that city into the hands of Persia. For it was clear that Prince Kámran would make terms with the Persians rather than submit to Dost Muhammad.

Lord Auckland despatched at that time an embassy to Dost Muhammad, on, what was termed, a commercial mission. The chief member of this embassy was Captain Alexander Burnes, an officer of the Bombay army, possessing rare ability, a colloquial knowledge of the languages of Central Asia, and a thorough acquaintance, acquired by travelling alone dressed as a native in the countries beyond the Oxus, with the habits and modes of thought of the children of the soil. Burnes reached Kábul the 20th of September, 1837, and was extremely well received by the Amír. He found him, however, more intent upon the recovery of Pesháwar, which had been filched from him some years before by Ranjit Singh, than on the recovery of Herát. Burnes, whilst holding out to him no hope that his views would be regarded with favour, forwarded reports of his interviews with the Amír to the Governor-General. Before he could receive a reply another agent appeared upon the field.

This new agent was a young Russian officer named Viktevich. Viktevich was a Lithuanian, who, exiled for his share in a Polish Conspiracy, had spent his time in travel in Central Asia, had gained the pardon of his Government, and who was now employed to undertake a secret mission to Kábul. The object of his mission was to counteract and render nugatory the influence of Burnes.

At the first it appeared as though the young Lithuanian would fail. Dost Muhammad, still hopeful of a favourable reply from India, scarcely noticed him. But when, on the 21st February, a reply came from the Governor-General intimating courteously but plainly, that whilst he was ready to treat with the Amír on matters affecting the Persian expedition, he would not aid him to recover Pesháwar, he changed his tone. Turning to the Russian agent, the Amír obtained from him all the promises he desired. In return Viktevich obtained his sanction to conclude an alliance between the Kandahar brothers of the Amír and Persia.

On the 26th April, Burnes, utterly hopeless of success, turned his back on Kábul. The failure of his endeavour to make a friend and ally of the then *de facto* ruler of Afghánistán made Lord Palmerston resolve to supplant him by a sovereign who should be nothing else in his foreign policy than a tool and agent of the British. Under his instructions, then, Lord Auckland brought a royal member of the family of Sháh Ahmad, the ex-king Sháh Shuja, from his enforced exile at Ludiáná, and directed the assembly of a considerable army to replace him on the throne of Kábul.

But before the army could be fully assembled, the object which Lord Palmerston had most at heart had been accomplished in an unforeseen and unexpected manner. A young Englishman, Eldred Pottinger, had entered the Bombay Artillery in the year 1827. Active, indus-

trious, eager to gain knowledge and quick in acquiring it, young Pottinger had early obtained a political staff appointment in Sindh under his uncle, Colonel, afterwards Sir Henry, Pottinger. Anxious to explore the countries and to make himself acquainted with the habits and manners of the people between the Indus and the Oxus and beyond the latter river, Eldred obtained, in 1837, his uncle's permission to visit those lands as an independent traveller. Disguising himself as a horsedealer from Kachh, young Pottinger crossed the Indus and, travelling in a manner the least likely to attract attention, took the road to Kábul. From that capital he resolved to proceed to Herát, but, aware that in the disguise of a saintly character his nationality would be still less likely to be discovered, he threw off the garb of a horsedealer and assumed that of a Saiad or Holy man. After many adventures, including a dangerous detention by a Hazáreh chief which promised at one time to put a forcible end to his wanderings, Pottinger reached Herát in safety. This was on the 18th August. He was still there when, a month later, information reached the city that a Persian army was marching against it. On the arrival of this news the ruler, Prince Kámran, was at his wits' end. His prime minister and factotum, Yár Muhammad, showed, however, a resolution worthy of the occasion. Not only did he announce his determination to defend the city to the last, but he took all the means of which he was master to strengthen its defences and to increase the garrison.

Never was a danger more real. The Russian minister at Teheran, Count Simonitch, had not only advanced fifty thousand tomaunns to the Sháh, but had promised that potentate that if he would take Herát the balance of the debt due by Persia to Russia should be remitted. He went even further. He gave him, to aid in the attack, a

Russian general, General Barofski; encouraged him to employ General Samson, a Russian in the Persian service; and, with that general, two thousand Russian soldiers who, to save appearances, were officially described as deserters from the Russian army!

Upon Eldred Pottinger the information that a Persian army so commanded and so assisted was advancing against Herát produced an electric effect. A British officer, possessing skill, energy, daring, and that self-reliant character the display of which by the sons of Great Britain has made the British empire, he felt that the time for disguise had passed, that he must avow himself and take his part in the defence of the threatened city. He did avow himself to the minister, was well received, was presented to Prince Kámran, and was authorized by both to assist in the defence.

The siege began the 22nd November following. It lasted more than nine months—till the 8th of September, 1838. Of that siege Eldred Pottinger, the only Englishman within the walls of the city, was the hero. True it was that the earthwork defences were crumbling and in disrepair: true, that the parapets were so rotten that they fell like timber before the fire of the light guns of the besiegers: true, that the Russian allies of the Persians, furnished with the modern appliances of Europe, inspired the garrison with the fear that they were mining under the walls. This was all true, but the indomitable Englishman was present ever to repair breaches, to lead a rallying party, to meet mine with countermine. During the siege he, at the request of Prince Kámran, visited the Persian camp with proposals for accommodation. These, however, were refused, and the attack recommenced more furiously than before. But the steadfast purpose of the garrison was not to be shaken: they repaired every breach

and repulsed every assault. On the 19th April, Major D'Arcy Todd, an officer of the Bengal Artillery, who had been for many years employed in the Persian army and had won the respect of all with whom he had come in contact, entered the city, under a flag of truce, with a message from the Sháh. He was the first Englishman who had ever appeared in Herát- wearing a British uniform, and his tight-fitting clothes, contrasting with the loose garments of the Asiatics, roused the most vivid curiosity. Major Todd came to announce that the Sháh was ready to accept British mediation. He returned with the message that Prince Kámran was equally agreeable to such a course. Not for a moment, however, did hostilities cease in consequence of that agreement. The siege was conducted as vigorously as before. Shortly afterwards, however, the Sháh withdrew from his offer to accept the arbitration of the British.

Month followed month, and the Russo-Persian army still plied the city with shot and shell. Every day, however, brought fresh misery to the besieged. Food became very scarce; the stench caused by the want of sewers or any means of drainage almost unendurable; in the month of May famine and pestilence stalked hand in hand through the streets. Under the influence of these dread twin-sisters the defence began to flag, and the breaches remained unrepaired. Everything presaged an early and fatal termination of the siege.

It is under such circumstances that a great man is really divine. It is not too much to say that at this conjuncture Eldred Pottinger became, in the eyes of the Herátis, the object of their trust, their veneration, their every hope. He was to them what Gordon was in 1884 to the people of Khartoum. These feelings were specially manifested on the 24th June. On that day the besiegers made a

well-planned and very determined attack on four parts of the city. At three of these they were repulsed. But at the fourth, they had almost carried the breach when the Vizier, Yár Muhammed, accompanied by Pottinger reached the spot. Yár Muhammed was a brave man, but he was cowed by the sight which met his gaze—the sight of the garrison giving way before their advancing foe. He urged them to rally, but he was too overcome himself to give them the example. Then was Pottinger's opportunity. He made a despairing appeal to the Vizier, inspired him with a portion of his own resolution; then, with his aid, he re-formed the now encouraged defenders and forced back the foe.

The month of July passed without any renewal of activity on the part of the besiegers. On the 11th of the following month the Sháh received in his camp an English officer, Colonel Stoddart, deputed to inform him that the continuance of the siege meant war with England. Little less than one month later the Persian army retired behind its own frontier!

The conclusion that, because the Persians after a siege of ten months' duration were in the end repelled, Herát was therefore impregnable, would be entirely fallacious. Eldred Pottinger deliberately declared that Muhammed Sháh might have taken the city by assault within twenty-four hours after his appearance before its walls if his troops had been efficiently commanded. We may go further and add—to use the language of the historian of the events of that period—the late Sir John Kaye—that but for the heroism of the young Bombay Artilleryman, Herát would under the actual circumstances have fallen!

With the raising of the siege of Herát the necessity for English intervention in the affairs of Afghánistán had disappeared. The object originally contemplated by Lord

Palmerston had been accomplished. Russia had received a check in her endeavour to use Persia as a cat's paw to filch away the most important of all the positions covering India. If England, on the retirement of the Persian army, had entered into an arrangement with Dost Muhammad, an arrangement for which he was then eager, the relations between India and the mountainous country which is naturally its frontier redoubt, would have been settled on a firm basis. But, unfortunately, before the raising of the siege of Herát had become known, Lord Auckland had pledged himself to Sháh Shuja, and it was determined to carry out the policy of substituting for a ruler of doubtful fidelity a prince who in all his foreign relations would be the tool of England.

It is not necessary here to do more than record the failure of that unfortunate policy. After nearly four years of desperate venture, it resulted in the restoration to supreme sway in Kábul of the prince whom we had expelled.

Embittered as he naturally was against the people who had expelled him, Dost Muhammad returned to Kábul with a far higher idea of the resources of the British nation than he had held before his enforced exile. He had visited Calcutta and seen their ships, their arsenals, their fortresses, and, though many years elapsed before he entered into friendly relations with his old enemies, he was resolved from the first moment of his return to do nothing to tempt them to renew their attack upon himself. It is true that in the death-throes of the struggle for the Panjáb, he allowed one of his sons to lead a cavalry brigade to assist the Sikhs in the battle which consummated their overthrow; but after the British frontier had been permanently advanced beyond the Indus, he remained for a time quiescent. The renewed intrigues of Persia for the recovery of Herát forced him at last to renew friendly relations with his old enemy.

In that year, 1854, his son Ghulam Haidar visited Pesháwar for that purpose. He was met there by the late Lord Lawrence, at the time plain John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of the Panjáb. On that occasion the famous agreement was signed in which the Amir of Afghánistán covenanted "to be the friend of the friends, and the enemy of the enemies of the Hon^{ble}. East India Company."

If we reflect for a moment upon this most important agreement, we shall arrive at the inevitable conclusion that it accomplished little more than the carrying of political relations back to the point at which they were when Burnes visited Kábul in 1837-8. It blotted out the intervening events. The first Afghán war had, in a word, lost for us eighteen years which might have well been employed in cementing relations necessary for the safety of the British empire in India.

Doubtless the political aspect which prompted the Amír to send his son to Pesháwar, had many points of similarity with the political aspect of 1837. On both occasions Herát was threatened by the same Asiatic power, stirred up by the same European power. But if the English had grown wiser, so likewise had Dost Muhammad. He no longer talked of recovering Pesháwar. He saw the full significance of the movement about Herát, and he wanted the support of the English to baffle it.

In 1854 England was at war with Russia; that power therefore, only exercised a legitimate right when, the barriers of an independent Caucasus still existing, she incited Persia to renew her attempts upon the fortified city which had repulsed her in 1838.

The incitations of Russia produced corresponding action on the part of Persia. She sent an army in the autumn of 1856 against Herát, and that city, no longer defended by

an Eldred Pottinger, surrendered to her in the month of October of the same year.

But Lord Palmerston was Prime Minister of England ; and Lord Palmerston was firmly resolved that Persia should not hold the city, and with the city the province which would constitute a new base for an army hostile to British India. Herát had, I have said, fallen in October 1856. On the 1st November, Lord Palmerston declared war against Persia, and despatched an army to attack her on her most vulnerable side, in the Persian gulf.

Never has an expedition been better planned or better executed. Never certainly has energetic action obtained more promptly the desired result. War was declared, I have said, the 1st November, 1856. Peace was signed the 4th March, 1857. In the interval, Persia had been defeated in two battles. By the terms of the peace she agreed to restore Herát to the Afgháns !

Before the signature of the Peace, the British acting by the mouth of Mr. John Lawrence, had signed another agreement with the Amír promising him a monthly allowance of £10,000 and arranging for the permanent residence of a British agent—a native of India—at Kábul. In the course of the years immediately following, Dost Muhammad brought Western Afghánistán, including Herát, more completely under his own personal sway.

On his death, in 1863, a civil war ensued for the succession. That war lasted, with varying fortunes, for five years. It was only in January 1869, that the most capable of the sons of Dost Muhammad, Sher Ali, obtained over his last remaining rival, the present Amír Abdul Rahman, a victory so crushing that from that moment all opposition ceased, and Afghánistán with its borders as they are described in the first two pages of the first chapter became united under one head.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROGRESS OF RUSSIA TOWARDS INDIA.

IN 1854 Nicholas, Czar of all the Russias, struck his long meditated blow for the possession of Constantinople. He failed, and he died. His successor, Alexander II., made peace with the two great western powers who had baffled his father, and announced ostentatiously that it was his intention to devote himself to domestic reforms. As an earnest of his sincerity he abolished serfdom.

But whilst hoodwinked Europe was praising the sagacity, the prudence, and the moderation of the young Czar, that astute prince was straining his empire to break down the mountain barrier which barred his free access to the steppes of Central Asia. The very year that witnessed the signature of the Peace of Paris (April 1856) saw him hurl an army of 150,000 men against the passes of the Caucasus. Fiercely did the heroic mountaineers resist. But numbers prevailed. At the end of three years the strongholds of the Caucasus had been stormed; the hero who had led the resistance, the illustrious Schamyl, was a prisoner (6 September 1859), and the mountaineers, who had for so many years successfully defied Russia, had abandoned their native fastnesses to seek refuge within the dominions of the Sultan.

The Caucasus conquered, Russia, who for some years had been working her way across the low undulating plains which lie between the Alatan range and the Jaxartes, made

her spring across that river. The Khanate of Khokand, having a population of three millions, was the first object of her attack. For the moment she spared it to effect the capture of the city of Tchemkend. This capture brought her into collision with the troops of Bokhára—a collision which resulted in the defeat of the Amír of that place and the occupation of the town of Turkistan, two hundred and twenty miles from Khokand.

To allay the apprehensions of England the Russian Prime Minister, Prince Gortschakoff, proceeded (November, 1864) to issue a kind of manifesto. In this remarkable document the Prince justified the permanent occupation of the two towns I have mentioned, on the plea that hostilities against them had been rendered necessary by the predatory instincts of the populations bordering the Russian frontier. He proceeded, then, to imply, though he was careful not to state absolutely, that the final point of Russian advance had been reached. "Russia," he declared, "was now in the presence of a more solid and compact, less unsettled and better organized social state; fixing for us with geographical precision the limit up to which we must advance, and at which we must halt."

The ink with which this manifesto was penned was barely dry, when Russia deliberately departed from the pacific programme which it sketched out. Under the pretence that some of her officers whom she had dispatched to Bokhára to negotiate, had been unduly detained in that city, she renewed her hostilities with the Amír. Tashkend, an important town in the valley of the Chirchik, with a population of 80,000 souls, the great emporium of Central Asia for cotton and rice, some ninety miles from Khokand, fell before her troops (June 1865). But no sooner was she assured of this conquest than she again appeared before Europe with protestations and excuses. Again did

she declare (September 1865) by the voice and despatches of the Prime Minister, that the Czar "had no desire to add further to his dominions." Scarcely, again, was the ink of the despatch dry, when (1866) the troops of the Czar made a spring upon and captured the walled town of Khojend, the key of the Jaxartes, seventy miles from Khokand, like Tashkend, a great manufactory of cotton goods, and possessing a population of 20,000. Before Europe could learn even of this new conquest Russian troops had overrun the province of Khokand, known also as Ferghana. By a ukase dated July 1867 the Czar formally annexed one half of this rich and fertile province with an area of more than 28,000 square miles to the Russian empire. The remaining half he conferred for the moment, and only for the moment, upon a native chieftain, to be held under the suzerainty of the Russian crown.

The time had now arrived when Russia conceived it necessary to make a still more important step. Bokhára had been snubbed and humiliated, but in the minds of the populations of Central Asia the influence of the powerful Amír of that independent state was still preponderant. It was necessary to cause that influence visibly to diminish. It is always easy to pick a quarrel. General Kaufman, the new military commander in Central Asia, proceeded then to establish a fortified post in dangerous contiguity to the famous city of Samarkhand, a hundred and thirty miles to the east of the capital. The insult was resented and war ensued. To a war between forces so unequally matched there could be but one result. Russia occupied and annexed Samarkhand. It was the most important conquest she had till then achieved. Its immediate result was to force the most venerated chief of Central Asia, the Amír of Bokhára, to become a tributary of the Czar!

CHAPTER II.

HERÁT, OR THE FRONTIER OF AFGHÁNISTÁN COVERING
THE APPROACH TO BRITISH INDIA.

THE Khanate of which the city of Herát is the capital, formed from west to east like a wedge, stretches from the slopes of the Paropamisian range to the marshy lake of Sēistan ; on the west it is bounded by Persian Khorásán; on the east and south-east by the province of Kandahar and the Siah-koh. Between the spurs of that mountain and of the Paropamisus, and even more to the north, the Heri-rúd, which flows first westward and takes afterwards a northerly direction, waters a tableland which, fertile beyond fertility even as it is known in the East, constitutes an oasis surrounded by stony ridges, sandy wastes and by steppes. This favoured district covers an area of 120,000 square miles, and supports nearly a million and a half of inhabitants. In the northern portion dwell the Kazilbashis, Shiahs in religion and Persian in origin; the Aimaks, Súnis in faith and the descendants of the Iranian Tadshicks; and the Hazáreh's, a Turanian race, speaking the Turki language and Shiahs by religion. More to the south the people are almost all Tadshicks, with a sprinkling of Afgháns, of Turkomans, and of Hindús.

The city which gives its name to this fertile region lies

four miles north of a point of the Heri-rúd, where that river is spanned by a bridge with twenty-six arches. It is about 420 miles to the west of the Afghán capital, Kábul, about 200 south-east of Meshed, and 202 miles south-east by south of Sarakhs. It forms a kind of irregular parallelogram surrounded by a thick mud wall from twelve to eighteen feet high, backed by a brick wall ten feet high and provided with thirty towers and five well-fortified gates. Herát has greatly fallen from the high position it held when it was described as the Pearl of the World.* The ruins in its vicinity testify to its former greatness. From that position it fell, partly perhaps in consequence of the rivalry of Meshed, supported by the wealth and influence of Persia, but mainly because of the constant wars and the long-continued oppression which in the course of a hundred and fifty years have caused the decrease of the population from a hundred thousand to a little more than one third of that number. Herát, however, the capital of the fertile oasis which covers the approaches to India, the centre point for the caravan routes of Central Asia, must ere long resume her lost position. Again will she become, whether under English auspices or under the auspices of Russia, the granary and garden of Central Asia. The crucial moment has now arrived to decide whether her splendid resources will be used for the invasion of India by Russia, or for the defence of India against that aggressive power.

A glance at the past history of Herát will be sufficient to prove the vital importance of this question. The Mogol rulers who preceded the British in the occupation of India always recognised the necessity of guarding in their own

* "Khorásán is the oyster-shell of the world, and Herát is its Pearl."—*Eastern Proverb*.

These events happened in 1868. I was in India at the time, and I can well recollect the profound impression which the capture and annexation of the famous city of Samarkhand produced in the bazaars of that country. The fame of Samarkhand had spread over all Asia. In the imaginations of its several populations it was the second city of the world, scarcely inferior, if at all inferior, to the Rûm—the Constantinople—of the Caliph of the Muhammadan faith. And now Samarkhand had fallen ! What wonder if the mind of the untravelled Oriental could scarcely grasp the greatness of the people who had captured it !

The reader will do well to bear in mind that the annexation of Samarkhand was almost synchronous with the termination of the five years' civil war in Afghánistán. During that civil war the relations between India and its mountainous borderland had not improved. For whilst the Viceroy of India, Sir John Lawrence, had endeavoured to maintain a rigid impartiality between the contending rivals, the victor, Sher Ali, loudly complained of the little friendliness which had been displayed towards himself. Whilst then the year which witnessed Sher Ali sole ruler of Afghánistán found the relations between that country and British India extremely strained, it saw Russia planted on the eastern Oxus and its tributaries, within striking distance of the north-eastern portion of the dominions of the ruler of Kábul.

It would appear that this near approach of Russia attracted the attention of the British Government. Forgetting that Russia is really an Asiatic power, and that those who deal with her in diplomacy should always bear in mind that deception, or excellence in the art of deceiving, is regarded as the chiefest virtue in an Asiatic politician, Lord Clarendon, early in 1869, suggested to Prince

Gortschakoff the desirability of constituting Afghánistán a neutral zone. The astute Chancellor of the Russian empire caught the idea with enthusiasm. He hastened to declare that his master the Czar, "*looks upon Afghánistán as completely outside the sphere within which Russia may be called upon to exercise her influence.*" Meanwhile, however, the Government of India had objected, and very properly objected, to Lord Clarendon's proposal. Afghánistán, said the Governor-General in so many words, can never be a neutral zone for India: it is bound to India geographically and politically, and must continue so to be bound. And in that light it is necessary that Afghánistán should be regarded by Russia!

Upon this question the negotiations with Russia were prolonged for two years, the Russian Government continuing to protest throughout that period that "Russia had no further intention of going south" and that "extension of territory was extension of weakness." Ultimately it was decided by the two Powers that the boundary of Afghánistán should be fixed, and it was agreed that all the countries in the effective possession of Sher Ali, and those which had previously acknowledged the rule of Dost Muhammad, should be comprised within that boundary. It was further arranged that the memoranda and papers on this subject should be submitted to General Kaufman, as the person nearest the spot capable of judging the question, in order that he might report to the Russian Government what were the actual boundaries. The matter drifted on. General Kaufman sent no report. Finally, on October, 17, 1872, Lord Granville wrote a dispatch to Lord Augustus Loftus, for communication to the Russian Government, in which he stated that the British Government, not having received any information from Russia, had been obliged to define the frontier in the mode they considered most

just. Lord Granville then marked out the several lines of demarcation as I have stated them in the first chapter. This frontier was accepted by Russia, and the acceptance notified by Prince Gortschakoff in dispatches dated the 7th (19th) December, 1872, and the 19th (31st) January, 1873. Meanwhile Russia had been pertinaciously maturing the plans which she had long nursed with respect to Khiva. To enable the reader to understand this subject thoroughly I must digress for a moment from the continuous course of the story.

Even so far back as the time of Peter the Great, Khiva had been an object of Russian greed. The disastrous fate however, which attended an expedition, despatched in 1716 by that famous monarch had for long acted as a deterrent. Three attempts to explore were subsequently made, prior to the ascension of the Emperor Paul ; the first by a simple agent in 1731 ; the second by a surveyor ten years later ; and the third by an oculist favoured by the Empress Catherine, named Blankenagal, in 1793. Blankenagal on his return wrote a narrative of his travels, in which he painted in terms so glowing the wealth of Khiva and its importance as a commercial centre that it inflamed the Emperor Paul, —who though murdered because his murderers called him mad, had ever a method in his madness—to re-open the idea so long held in abeyance. He actually despatched Count Orloff at the head of a considerable force in 1801 to carry out his views. Orloff had reached Irgiz, now known as Fort Uralsk, when he heard of the assassination of his master. He returned, and during the vast European complications which followed the accession of Alexander I., the subject was laid on the shelf. It was taken up again in 1819, when Captain Mouravieff was despatched from the army of the Caucasus to reconnoitre the eastern shores of the Caspian, to select there a spot for the erec-

tion of a fort, and to proceed thence to Khiva. Escorted by a few friendly Turkomans Mouravieff reached Khiva in safety. There, however, he was seized by order of the Khán, imprisoned, and detained for nearly seven weeks before he was allowed to return. It would seem that his presence in Khiva excited the strong suspicions of the Khán and his advisers, for, subsequently to his return, the Turkomans of the desert inaugurated a system of pillage with respect to the Russian caravans such as they had never dreamt of before. Possibly their action was stimulated by the unwonted appearance of Russian soldiers at various points in the steppe, avowedly with the purpose of affording protection to their trading countrymen. There is little reason to doubt that even these nomads suspected that armed parties who occupied military forts on the steppe, nominally to protect Russian caravans, might gradually take root there, and even advance further.

The system of plunder inaugurated by the Khivans became at last so unbearable that, in 1839, General Perovski was despatched from Orenburg, with 5,235 men and twenty-two guns, to punish the Khán. The intense cold of the winter, the difficulties and inhospitalities of the steppe, fought hard, however, for Khiva. After losing one third of his force before accomplishing half the distance between Orenburg and the threatened city, Perovski was compelled to retrace his steps. The sufferings of his force during the retreat were extreme.

With the exception of the despatch of two minor missions in 1841 and 1842, both abortive in their results, no further serious move with respect to Khiva was made by Russia for nineteen years. In the meanwhile however two English officers, one Captain (now General) James Abbott, who has written a most interesting account of his mission; the other, the late Sir Richmond Shakespeare,

had penetrated to Khiva from Herát, and had persuaded the Khán to release the Russian prisoners still languishing in captivity. After that there followed the lull of nineteen years. But, in 1858, at the very time, be it remembered, when, after the Crimean war, the barrier of Caucasus was being assailed, General Ignatieff, subsequently the well-known ambassador at Constantinople, was despatched on a special mission to Khiva and Bokhára. The mission of Ignatieff was outwardly one merely of compliment, and it led to no result. It may in fact be pronounced a failure, for, notwithstanding his great persuasive powers, the astute Russian neither succeeded in persuading the Khán of Khiva to sign the treaty which he had prepared and brought with him, nor in inducing him to put a stop to the raid on the Russian caravans.

Russia determined at length to put a final stop to these outrages. In 1869 she completed a strong fort and naval station at Krasnovodsk on the Caspian. She supplemented these the year following by erecting another fort and another naval station at Tchikislar, the point where the Atrek flows into the sea. Able now to despatch expeditions from a new base resting on the Caspian, she prepared in 1871 and 1872 to take decisive action.

The rumour of these preparations reached the Khán of Khiva and frightened him not a little. As he still refused, however, to accept the terms offered by Russia, or to receive a Russian envoy in his capital, dreading them *et dona ferentes*, Russia resolved to strike the blow she had been preparing. In July 1872, then, she fitted out and despatched an expedition under the command of General Markazoff. That officer, setting out from Tchikislar, easily reached Igly, on the old bed of the Oxus, and just within the borders of the Kara Kúm desert. At this point began the natural difficulties of his route. The Turkomans came to augment

them. These daring horsemen surrounded Markazoff, cut off his baggage camels, and finally forced him (September 1872) to an ignominious retreat.

Russia could not allow such a defeat to pass unavenged. She organised a new and more powerful expedition, and placed at the head of it the general whose conquest of Samarkhand had made him the best known European in Central Asia—the famous General Kaufman. At the same time, to still the apprehensions of England, already roused by the magnitude of the preparations, the Czar instructed his ambassador at the Court of St. James's to declare that though an expedition would be despatched, it would be “a very little one”; that it would consist of but four and a half battalions; and that its purpose was simply and solely to punish acts of brigandage. “*Far from it being the intention of the Czar,*” added the ambassador, “*to take possession of Khiva, positive orders had been issued to prevent it.*”

I pause here for a moment to call attention to this principle of Russian policy, now renewed on the borders of Afghánistán—the principle of protesting moderation at St. Petersburg whilst the agents on the spot are spurred on to action which shall be decisive. How that action works is well described in the following letter written by Lord Palmerston to Lord Clarendon, and which has recently been republished in the *Times*, March 23 :—

“The policy and practice of the Russian Government has always been to push forward its encroachments as fast and as far as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments would allow it to go, but always to stop and retire when it was met with decided resistance, and then to wait for the next favourable opportunity to make another spring on its intended victim. In furtherance of this policy, the Russian Government has always had two strings to its bow—moderate language and disinterested professions

at St. Petersburg and at London ; active aggression by its agents on the scene of operations. If the aggressions succeed locally, the St. Petersburg Government adopts them as a *fait accompli* which it did not intend, but cannot in honour recede from. If the local agents fail they are disavowed and recalled, and the language previously held is appealed to as a proof that the agents have overstepped their instructions. This was exemplified in the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi, and in the exploits of Simonivitch and Viktevitch in Persia. Orloff succeeded in extorting the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi from the Turks, and it was represented as a sudden thought, suggested by the circumstances of the time and place, and not the result of any previous instructions ; but having been done, it could not be undone. On the other hand, Simonivitch and Viktevitch failed in getting possession of Herát, in consequence of our vigorous measures of resistance ; and as they failed, and when they had failed, they were disavowed and recalled, and the language previously held at Petersburg was appealed to as a proof of the sincerity of the disavowal, although no human being with two ideas in his head could for a moment doubt that they had acted under specific instructions.—July 31, 1853.” (*Vide* Lord Palmerston’s Life, Vol. II., 273, 12mo. ed.)

I now return to the date whence I digressed to deal with the earlier dealings of Russia with Khiva to the close of the period of the two years which followed Lord Clarendon’s unfortunate proposition that Afghánistán should be regarded as a neutral zone, and the reception of the reply of Russia that she looked upon Afghánistán as completely outside the sphere within which Russia might be called to exercise her influence. That lull of two years had been spent by Russia in preparing an expedition which should deal finally, “once and for ever,” with Khiva. Reports

from their agents at Persia and elsewhere that such an expedition was preparing had, during that period, reached the British Government, and that Government had instructed its ambassador at St. Petersburg to ascertain the exact state of the case. The Russian Chancellor always denied that any expedition was in preparation, and his words on this point were so forcible, so explicit, and so absolute that the British Ambassador could not but accept them. The scales, at last, fell from his eyes. Towards the close of 1872, Lord A. Loftus informed his Government that he had gained the conviction that such an expedition had been decided upon, and would take place as soon as weather and circumstances would permit. Still the Government of the Czar and the Russian Ambassador in London continued to evade and to deny. Forced at last to admit that there was to be an expedition, they pleaded pathetically that it was to be on a very small scale, that it would consist of but four and a half battalions, and that it was designed merely to punish acts of brigandage. Then followed the memorable declaration which I cited in a preceding paragraph, and which I here repeat—a declaration typical of the value which it is always necessary to place on the words of Russian Czars, Russian Chancellors, and Russian ambassadors; “*Far from it being the intention of the Czar to take possession of Khiva, positive orders have been issued to prevent it.*”

What followed? The echo of the words I have italicised had scarce died away, when—not a mere “four and a half battalions,” but five columns, numbering upwards of 12,000 men in all, started under the command in chief of General Kaufman, severally from Orenburg, from Tchikishlar, from Alexandrovsky, from Kazala, and from Jazakh, to converge on, and assault, Khiva. Yet, so great still were the natural difficulties of the route that the bulk

of this army was saved from destruction by the merest accident. The Tchikishlar column had to fall back from Igly—the extreme point reached by Markazoff in the previous expedition ; two of the other columns, with one of which was Kaufman himself, united, only to find themselves, a few days later, in the heart of a sandy desert, without supplies, without transport, without water. In this extremity they were saved from annihilation by a son of the desert, a ragged Kirghiz who disclosed the vicinity of wells containing abundant supplies of the precious fluid. The difficulties of the two remaining columns were more easily surmountable. Directed by the senior officer, General Verevkin, they reached Khiva, and took the city by assault. The natural result followed. Russia imposed her suzerainty upon the Khán, and annexed the whole of the Khivan territory on the right bank of the Oxus !

The capture and practical annexation of Khiva secured to Russia possession of the central point in the curved line which threatened the frontier of India. The left of that line was covered on its front by the Oxus and its confluent, and was flanked by Samarkhand ; its centre was at Khiva, communicating with the left by the Oxus, and threatening alike Merv and Sarakhs ; the right, based on the Caspian, would naturally creep along the northern frontier of Persia, subdue the Turkomans of the desert, then halt at a place within striking distance of Merv and Sarakhs ; until, having neutralized or made a vassal of Persia, she should pounce upon those salient places, and prepare for the final spring which should land her in Herát.*

* These are not prophecies after the event. In his work on Herat, published in January, 1880 ; in his speeches after his visit to India in 1880-1 ; and in two articles entitled " Russian Conquests in the East," published in the *Army and Navy Magazine* in 1882, the author did his utmost to warn his countrymen of the inevitable issue.

But, not even the capture of Khiva, effected in spite of the denials and solemn assurances of the Czar and his ministers, could either rouse the British Government to a sense of the actual danger of the position, or weaken its faith in the promises of Russian diplomacy. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Granville, not only declined to examine "too minutely how far these arrangements"—the annexation of Khiva—"were in strict accordance with the assurances given in January by Count Schouvaloff," but, hopeful still, he again addressed the Russian Chancellor on the subject of the two Governments arriving at a clear and frank understanding regarding their respective positions in Central Asia. There is a sublime irony in the tone of the reply of Prince Gortschakoff to this confiding overture. Having obtained, first, by hoodwinking the British Government all that he required, or rather, all that for the moment he was able to obtain, in Central Asia; and having in the second place obtained the forgiveness of the British Government for the violation of his plighted faith—a forgiveness accompanied by the expression of a hope that no such violation would occur in the future—Prince Gortschakoff expressed, in reply, his "entire satisfaction" with the "just view Lord Granville had taken!"

The conquest of Khiva left Russia face to face with the Turkomans. These hardy sons of the desert, kinsmen of the Osmánli who all but conquered Europe—for it was the grandfather of Osmán who, in the reign of Chengiz Khán, emigrated with his tribe of Turkomans to Asia Minor from Northern Khorásán—lived a wild and predatory life on the desert bordering the northern frontier of Khorásán. Herdsmen, they were likewise slave-dealers, nor should the fact be attributed to them as a crime. To capture and sell slaves had been the custom of the desert from time im-

memorial, and the wild, uninstructed Turkoman was in that respect not one whit behind his more cultivated rival the Khorásáni of Persian Khorásán. The Turkomans had the reputation of being the most skilful, the boldest, the most dashing horsemen of Central Asia. Nor was their martial record at all a blank. The fathers' fathers of the Turkomans of the present day had responded to the call of Nadir Sháh and had led the way for Ahmad Sháh Durání to India. They had been foremost alike on the field of Panipat and in the sack of Dihli. Sons of freedom, impatient of restraint, they had taken no root in the land which they had helped to conquer, but had ever returned to the illimitable spaces of that sandy desert, the soil of which few but they ever cared to tread !

With men such as these, Russia, after her conquest of Khiva (June 1872) had to deal. Her policy, as usual, was direct. No notions of sentiment or of mercy would allow it to deviate a single hair's breath from its absolutely straight course. That policy may be summed up in six words. It was simply "to conquer, that she might use." Realizing the enormous advantage which might accrue to her in the years that were to come by the employment as her vanguard of a whole nation of "the finest horsemen in Central Asia" she yet felt the necessity of first dominating their spirits, of curbing their fierce love of independence, of, in a certain sense, breaking their spirits by the display of remorseless cruelty ; that accomplished, the desert warriors would obey the power which would thus have subdued them, as implicitly as their fathers' fathers had obeyed the orders of Nadir Sháh !

Moralists may talk of the civilizing mission of Russia, of the advantage which must accrue to the world from the extension of her sway in Central Asia. They forget the great truth which every English politician ought to repeat to

himself every day and all day, the truth that Russia herself is in all essentials an Asiatic power, and should be treated diplomatically as one is accustomed to treat diplomatically every avowed Asiatic power.

I must ask now the moralist and the diplomat to accompany me into the great desert after the absolute submission of Khiva had been secured. There was a tribe of Turkomans, called the Yomud Turkomans, inhabiting the Hazávat district. The Yomuds were a Nomad people, whose sole wealth consisted in their flocks and herds; they had no ready cash. It was impossible for them to raise money by the sale of their cattle or their corn, or even of the jewels and ornaments of their wives and daughters, for in the desert there were no purchasers. Now General Kaufman had been engaged during the campaign in no actual battle. Without a fight he could not obtain the coveted Cross of St. George. He looked, then, to the desert for victims, and fixed his eye upon the Yomuds. Having ascertained all particulars regarding them, he imposed upon them the payment within ten days of a fine in money which he knew they could not pay. Vainly did they offer their jewels, their flocks, and their herds. The money was wanted, and they had it not, nor could they obtain it. Then, to punish their default, Kaufman inundated their country with his troops, ordered his generals to destroy their settlement, and to confiscate their herds and their property. His orders were obeyed with a refinement of mercilessness such as has never been surpassed in the records of crime.* The reign of terror was inaugurated!

From that time the warfare of Russia with the desert tribes was intermittent. It was not, however, till 1879 that

No one will suspect Schuyler of aught but sympathy with Russia: yet it is from his pages, and from the confirmatory letters of MacGahan, that I have drawn these facts.

the colossal Power of the North judged that the time had arrived to make an attempt to establish a permanent settlement in Turkoman territory. The point they selected for this purpose was Kizil Arvat, a place above, but slightly to the east of the highest point of the frontier of Persia, and not far south of the borders of the Kara-Kúm. The intention, plainly manifested, of thus establishing themselves permanently on their highway was not at all relished by the desert-born warriors. The chief of the tribe of Akal Tekkes, Nur Verdi Khán, who till that time had been disposed to reciprocate the friendly overtures of the Russians, at once took the alarm. No sooner did the leader of the Russian force, General Lomakin, attempted to arrange for a permanent occupation, than Nur Verdi assailed him at the head of all the warrior horsemen of his tribe. No details of this, the first struggle for the possession of the desert, ever reached the Europe which is outside of Russia. But this, at least, transpired : Lomakin was eventually besieged in his camp, and was so pressed there that he was forced to abandon his guns and retreat in disorder, pursued by crowds of horsemen to Krasnovodsk. He was even besieged there for several weeks !

Again could not Russia afford to allow this check to remain unavenged. In August 1878, she despatched a larger force from Tchikishlar under the orders of the same general. This time Lomakin reached Khojá Kala, a few miles to the south of Kizil Arvat, in safety. But there he was assailed by the same enemies led by the same daring warrior. He and his Russians were driven out of Khojá Kala and were literally chased back to Tchikishlar, from under the very guns of which place the pursuers carried off hundreds of his camels !

A third expedition then became necessary in 1879. General Lazareff, who had greatly distinguished himself in

the campaign in Armenia against Mukhtar Pasha in the previous year, was selected to command it. With Lomakin as his second in command, Lazareff set out at the head of his force—a force greatly in excess of that which had started in 1877—from Tchikishlar on the 18th June. His plan was to inflict a severe defeat on, and to dominate the spirit of the Turkomans before attempting to make a settlement. But at Tchát-i-Atrak, about midway to Kizil Arvat along the Persian frontier, Lazareff sickened and died. Lomakin, who succeeded him, and who shared his views, pushed on then to Kizil Arvat, and thence beyond Bámi, to a point within six miles of Dengli Tepé, a square built fort occupied by the Turkomans with their whole available force. On the 9th of September Lomakin marched against that not very formidable place. After a desperate battle, which lasted all day, and in which up to 5 P.M. they had all the advantage, the Russians were repulsed, and fell back, beaten, baffled, and humiliated, to the Caspian! They were unable even to reach that base before December had well set in!

But beaten, baffled, and humiliated though she had thrice been on this line, Russia adhered to her purpose with a steadfastness and pertinacity characteristic of her whole policy. Russia never surrenders a firmly-rooted idea. In 1880 she made preparations, on a still larger scale than before, to renew the attack on the line between Akhal and Askabad. To command the new expedition she summoned the man who enjoyed the highest reputation in her army, a man who possessed a European reputation for dash and daring, the leader of her war party, the famous Skobeleff.

Skobeleff possessed advantages which had been denied to Lomakin. In the spring then of 1880, the Turkoman chief who had led his countrymen to victory after victory, who in the course of his brilliant career had defeated three

nations, the Khivans, the Persians, and the Russians, the illustrious Nur Verdi Khán, had died. He had left no successor at all equal to himself. Whilst therefore, in 1880, the Russians, alike more numerous and more experienced in the warfare of the desert than in 1879, were led by the best general of whom their country could boast, the Turkomans had no leader who inspired them with the confidence which, in 1879, had gone far to enable them to repulse their foes.

The plan devised by Skobelev proved that he had completely mastered all the intricacies of the task which had been committed to his hands. Joined by a small body of men who marched from Khiva to the western border of the Tekke oasis, he marched with a select division, of which those men formed a part, from the Attrek to the Akhal oasis at Bámi, about 180 miles from the Caspian and about 80 from the spot where the Turkomans had congregated, a fort called Geok Tepé, somewhat to the north of the scene of the disaster of the previous year. He then proceeded to fortify this post, covering it with intrenchments, with the idea of making it the base for a further advance. He made of it in fact what Wellington made of the lines of Torres Vedras. Within the lines thus formed Skobelev proceeded to store provisions and supplies, turning a deaf ear to the solicitations of those who pressed him to avenge without further delay the defeat of his predecessor. These supplies came from the Volga, from the Caucasus, and from Persia, and were conveyed by camel trains from Krasnovodsk. Several months were employed by Skobelev in these necessary preliminaries. At length, in January 1881, he advanced, attacked the children of the desert in their intrenchments at Geok Tepé, stormed their position, slaughtered thousands of the defenders, and pursued the remainder beyond Askabad. This time the rule of terror

did its work. It cowed the survivors into absolute and complete submission.

The usual political consequences followed. In the month of May of the same year the Czar issued an ukase by which he declared that the Transcaspian territory, the abode of the Akhal Tekkes, was annexed to Russia.

Nor was Russia worse served by her administrators than by her generals. In an incredibly short space of time, lines of rails, intended during the Russo-Turkish war for the use of the army of the Danube, and which had since been lying idle in Southern Russia, were transported to the eastern shore of the Caspian and were at once utilized in the newly acquired territories. So thoroughly in earnest were the officials, that before the conclusion of 1881 the line had been completed as far as Kizil Arvat, 144 miles from the Caspian. It is a remarkable fact, worthy of appreciation, that at that very moment the British Indian Government were selling the rails which had been brought at considerable expense to Quetta for the purpose of connecting Sibi with that important frontier fort, and that fort with Kandahar !

In a lecture of remarkable clearness and ability delivered at the Royal United Service Institution on the 16th May, 1884, Sir Edward Hamley, after describing the progress of Russia in the Transcaspian regions up to the period of Skobelev's success at Geok Tepé in 1881, proceeded to point out how the Russians, never losing sight of the definite aim of their policy, had, whilst passing on the railway from the eastern shores of the Caspian to Kizil Arvat and beyond Kizil Arvat, been at the same time careful to unite to the empire by the same iron band the Caucasian shores of the same. After pointing out the advantages of Baku on the Caucasian shore, as producing an inexhaustible quantity of fuel for railway consumption, and

informing his audience that at the end of 1882 the railway of the Caucasus was continued from Tiflis to Baku, with a branch to Batoum, a more convenient and healthy port than Poti, Sir Edward thus drew the following conclusions as to the advantages to be derived from the new route thus constituted:—"From Odessa," he continued, "troops can be conveyed across the Black Sea to Batoum in two days, from thence by rail to Baku in twenty-four hours, another twenty-four hours would see them landed at Krasnovodsk, transferred in lighters to the shallow water to Michaelovsk, and the entrainment of them begun, when the journey to Kizil Arvat, the present but by no means the final terminus of the Transcaspian line, occupies twelve hours.

"The communication with Odessa, of course, admits of the reinforcement of the Caucasian army to any extent. But the Caucasus itself forms an effectively independent territory for beginning a campaign. It is no wild, barbarous region, but a country rich, well-watered, and now thoroughly Russian, and its capital, Tiflis, in the advantages of its site and climate, its public and private buildings, and its establishment as the head-quarters of an army, may stand comparison with nearly any city in the Czar's dominions. The war strength of the army of the Caucasus is 160,000 men.

"The efficacy of the other channel of communication between Russia and the Caspian has also been largely increased of late years. Besides four lines of railway to points on the Volga, complete communication between the Neva and that river is afforded by the canal system of the country. And to obviate the interruption occurring in the winter months, a line of railway is projected from a point where many lines from Russia converge, in Cis-Caucasia, to Petrovsk on the Caspian, and thence along its shore to Baku. You will therefore probably agree that there is not

at present much difficulty, and that such as there is will shortly disappear, either in bringing reserves and stores, to any extent, on the lines from Northern Russia, and also from Southern Russia, to the Caspian, or in conveying the army of the Caucasus with its stores from that sea to the Transcaspian railway, and along that line to Kizil Arvat. That terminus is 135 miles from Askabad, to which place the railway will doubtless be carried. Askabad is 186 miles from Sarakhs and Sarakhs is 202 from Herát, only a few miles more than the distance from York to London."

I make no apology for this quotation, for the words of which it is composed present in the fairest and clearest light to the reader the immense advantages which Skobeleff's victory at Geok Tepé, and the consequent annexation of the Transcaspian territory, has procured for Russia. That territory is united now by the speediest of all modern modes of communication with St. Petersburg, with Moscow, and with all the great arsenals of Russia. That conquest brought not an isolated and outlying portion of Russia—but the whole Russian empire bound into one solid mass by the iron road, as near to Herát, within a few miles as the most advanced outposts of British India!*

As we go on we shall see that the evil did not stop there!

Nor was the power to concentrate an irresistible force upon the furthest point of its Transcaspian territory the only advantage gained for his country by Skobeleff at Geok Tepé. Leaving absolutely out of consideration the prestige, the moral influence—though that is a factor which must enter largely into the calculation of a statesman when he has to deal with Eastern peoples—there remain two distinct material advantages, both of which will affect very powerfully any struggle which may occur in Afghánistán or

* Kizil Arvat is 523 miles from Herát; the British outposts are 514.

on the existing British frontier, between Russia and Great Britain. These are (1), the enormous influence gained by the former over Persia; (2) the employment as the vanguard of her armies of the conquered Turkomans.

With respect to the first I shall again quote from the same competent authority, to whose warnings in May of last year the country turned a deaf ear. "Next to her resources for a campaign," said Sir Edward Hamley on that occasion, "Russia's relations with Persia are of prime importance." Describing then the various phases of the attitude of Persia towards Russia between 1876 and 1880, Sir Edward thus continued: "But, in the following year, after Skobeleff had established himself at Bámi, a remarkable change occurred in the attitude of Persia. Ostensible orders to the contrary notwithstanding, he was allowed to procure vast supplies of provisions from Khorásán; and when, after the capture of Geok Tepé, he marched beyond Askabad in pursuit, he was allowed to violate Persian territory without remonstrance, and the Turkomans who escaped into what they supposed to be the neutral territory of Persia were handed over as prisoners to the Russians. In fact how can Persia, without the strongest support, resist such a neighbour? The Russian border is co-terminous with hers from Mount Ararat to beyond Askabad. The fleet on the Caspian and the new railway give Russia the means of invading at a hundred points the bordering territory, furnishing a hundred good reasons why Persia could no more oppose the will of Russia than the mere human being of her own tales could oppose the tremendous spirit who rose in clouds from the sea, or descended on over-shadowing wings from the sky." Information which has been received since the lecture from which this passage is quoted was delivered, and since the Russian advances to Merv and Sarakhs, therein foreshadowed, have

become accomplished facts, goes to prove that at the present moment Persia is an inert mass to be moulded at will by her powerful neighbour.

The second advantage I have referred to—the incorporation of the Turkoman cavalry in the Russian army has been also already accomplished. The rule of terror, always an initial factor with Russia when dealing with Oriental races, did its work, as I have already said, at Geok Tepé. That crushing defeat and the unsparing manner with which it was followed, broke the free spirit of the desert-born warriors. Recognizing in their subduers their masters, they accepted their fate, and they are now ready to forage, to fight, and to plunder for the successors to the empire of Nadir Sháh !

I return from this digression—a digression necessary to display the great results obtained by Russia from Skobelev's triumph at Geok Tepé—to describe the further progress made in the Transcaspian line of conquest. I left the Russian army pursuing the Turkomans as far as Askabad, only 388 miles from Herát. I propose now to describe their further progress since that date.

The victory of Geok Tepé had subdued for ever, a very important tribe of the Turkomans, the Akhal Tekkes. But there were other tribes scarcely less formidable. These were the Sarik Turkomans, numbering 65,000 souls, lying along the Murgháb river between Merv and Herát ; the Tejend Turkomans, occupying the country watered by the river of that name to within thirty miles of Sarakhs ; and the Merv Tekkes or the tribe which pastured its herds round about Merv. All these tribes were to be absorbed.

The turn of the Tejend Turkomans came first. Terrified by the defeat of their brethren at Geok Tepé and its consequences, they offered, almost on the morrow of the victory, their submission to the conquerors. That submission

brought into the possession of Russia the Tejend oasis, a territory, to use the words of Lieutenant, now, I believe, Colonel, Alikhanoff, who surveyed it, "almost larger than that of Merv," and brought her within striking distance—30 miles—of Sarakhs, and within 232 of Herát. The Tejend river which waters that oasis is, in very deed, the Heri-rúd which waters Herát, for, flowing northwards as it approaches the Persian frontier near Kuhsan, it takes, just beyond Pul-i-Khátun, the name of the swamp in which it finally disappears. It forms then, if not a water road to Herát, yet a road which supplies troops marching along its banks with one of the two primary necessities for an army.

For a time after that submission Russia remained apparently quiescent. She was only biding her time. Whilst the attention of the politicians of England was fixed upon the events passing in Egypt and in the Soudan, they read one morning in January, 1884, that Merv had been occupied. Some years before, even statesmen who believed in the promises of Russia, had declared that her troops could never be allowed to occupy Merv. Yet in 1884, that occupation was allowed to pass with but a feeble protest!

The full significance of that important acquisition is not even yet properly appreciated by the governing classes and the people of these islands. In vain did two Englishmen and one foreigner attempt to rouse them to a sense of the danger it involved. One of these, Mr. Charles Marvin, whose services in respect of the Russo-Afghan question have been invaluable, and who, speaking and writing with absolute knowledge personally acquired, can understand better than any living man the feelings of the Cassandra of the Homeric legend, published at once a pamphlet* in

* "The Russian Annexation of Merv." W. H. Allen & Co.

which he dwelt emphatically upon the opportunities which such a movement gave to Russia. "The conquest of Merv," wrote Mr. Marvin, in February, 1884, "is something more than the annexation of a mid-desert oasis. It means the complete junction of the military forces of the Caucasus and Turkestan. It means, with the annexation of Akhal, the absorption of 100,000 of the best Irregular cavalry in the world, at a week's march from the city of Herát. It means the meeting, for the first time, of the Cossack and the Afghán. It means the complete enclosure of Khiva within the Russian empire, and the reduction of Bokhára from the independent position of a border state to the dependence of an incorporated province. It means the enclosure of more than 200,000 square miles of territory, and the addition to the Russian empire of a region as large as France. It means the completion of the conquest of the Central Asian deserts, and the commencement of the annexation of the great fertile mountain region of Persia and Afghánistán. It means the deliberate occupation of a strategical point, fraught with political entanglements of such a wide-spread nature, that, whether Russia desire it or not, she will be inevitably led, unless forestalled or checked by England, to Meshed, to Herát, to Balkh, and to Kábul. And she will not remain there. She will continue her swift advance until she triumphantly lays down her Cossack border alongside the Sepoy line of India."

It may be objected by some that these are the opinions of Mr. Marvin, and that they do not care to listen to Mr. Marvin, because, when the Conservatives were in office he was charged with divulging information which compromised the Government. I may remark, in passing, that that charge in no way affects the credibility of a man who has heard with his own ears the opinions expressed on the subject by Russian generals and Russian diplomatists, and

who, for the love of England, has spent his own money to warn England's people. But let us turn from Mr. Marvin, from this past-master of the history of Transcaspian aggression, and read what the greatest strategist of England has to say upon the subject.

“Commercially viewed,” said Sir Edward Hamley in the lecture from which I have already quoted, delivered in May of last year, “Russia has gained in Merv for the present merely a fresh burthen. The Turkomans, debarred from brigandage, and unfit for any sustained commercial or agricultural enterprises, will be but an impoverished community. They possess no towns nor institutions, nor territories which exhibit any mark either of prosperity or of the faculty of becoming prosperous. The one advantage of the possession is that the caravan route passing Bokhára to Meshed and the interior, and that from India by Herát to Central Asia, lie through Merv. But that it was once a centre of great prosperity is proved by the fact that the remains of four great cities exist there, the inhabitants of the last of which were driven out by the present semi-barbarians about a century ago. Under Russian rule that prosperity will revive—the land will once more teem with the crops to which nothing is wanting but good husbandry. And, when once again become populous and fertile, it will afford a secondary base against the Afghán frontier. In the meanwhile it closes the gap aforesaid, and as soon as Russia lays down her frontier line, the whole of that vast empire from the Baltic to the Danube, thence along the Black Sea, across the Caucasus to the Caspian, along the Persian frontier to Merv and Turkistán, and so on to Siberia, will lie in a ring fence. This is the Power which is now separated from a frontier which, presumably, we cannot allow her to overstep, by a borderland which is a barrier in no sense, and which I will endeavour briefly to describe.”

On the same subject, Sir Charles Macgregor wrote in 1875 :—"There is no doubt in my mind that the real danger lies in our permitting the Russians to concentrate unopposed at Merv, which is quite within *coup de main* distance of Herát ; and it is in this fact, and in this alone, that the value of Merv to the Russians lies. Once place Herát beyond the possibility of a *coup de main*, and I cannot imagine the astute statesmen of Russia persisting in the occupation of an isolated spot in the desert, the maintenance of which must cost a great deal." The forecast has been already proved true !

It will be observed that Sir Edward Hamley speaks of the new frontier as one "which, presumably, we cannot allow her (Russia) to overstep." But six months had not elapsed since the delivery of the lecture when Russia did take another step forward—a step, in my opinion, the most important of all subsequent to the victory of Geok Tepé. In the autumn of last year Russia advanced her outposts along the Persian frontier from Askabad to Sarakhs !

Russia would not have been Russia had she not accompanied this most important move onward by the usual attempt to deceive the gullible British public, and their worse than gullible representatives in the House of Commons. I shall show more clearly further on why the plea was that there was an old Sarakhs and a new Sarakhs, was of all pleas the most disingenuous. Russia gained the position on the bank of the Tejend most convenient to her for an operation against Herát, and the value of that position was, as I shall show, in no way affected by the fact that she did not occupy the fort as well ! Yet the excuse, lame as it was, went down : it was accepted ; and Russia was allowed to remain at old Sarakhs without even a remonstrance !

The enormous importance of this step has never been sufficiently appreciated. With all humility and with all earnestness I would beg my countrymen to turn for a moment from the selfish strife of parties, and devote a few minutes' consideration to a subject which affects, and vitally affects, the future position of the British Empire. The position occupied by old Sarakhs ought never to have been allowed to fall into the hands of Russia. That she was allowed to take it is a proof of the state of vassalage to which Persia has been reduced, for new and old Sarakhs constituted a frontier post of that country. Let us, for a moment, examine their position.

Fortunately, we are able, on this subject, to write "from the book." In 1875, one of the ablest and most accomplished officers who wear the British uniform, the present Quartermaster-General of Her Majesty's army in India, Major-General Sir Charles MacGregor, visited Sarakhs. There is no uncertainty in the opinion he gave regarding its value. "A glance at the map will show," he wrote, "that in the complication which must arise ere the Russo-Indian question can be deemed settled, its future—the future of Sarakhs—is likely to be a stirring one. Placed at the junction of roads from Herát and Meshed, by the Heri-rúd and Ab-i-Meshed valleys respectively, and at the best entrance to the province of Khorásán from the north, it cannot fail to exercise a very serious influence on the momentous issue of the above question. This must happen, whether it fall into the hands of the friends of England or into those of her foes. Whether Russia use Sarakhs as a base for offensive measures against Herát, or England use her as a defensive outpost to defeat any such operations, that position will be heard of again. And if my feeble voice can effect a warning, ere it is too late let it

here be raised in these words:—*If England does not use Sarakhs for defence Russia will use it for offence.*”*

I am no alarmist. The words I have quoted are the words of a very able man who has spent his life on the Indian frontier, who can speak the language of the Afgháns and the Khorásánis, a man who has ever kept his eyes and his ears well open. The journal of his travels teems with evidence that even in those days Persia was being Russianized. There is not a soldier living who knows MacGregor who would not accept as an absolute truth his warning words about Sarakhs. And yet, the English Government allowed Russia to take quietly and without remonstrance the plains commanding that most important place—a place which is an eye to see and an arm to strike. When a faint voice was raised in Parliament upon the question it was silenced by the disingenuous plea, already referred to, that there were two such places known as Sarakhs, and that the Sarakhs occupied was not the fortress but the old town !

Is there an old town of Sarakhs? There was indeed in earlier days an old Sarakhs, but there is but one fortified town now. Let the reader follow the description of Sir Charles MacGregor:—“The scene that met my eye” he writes, describing his survey of the country from the north tower of the only existing Sarakhs, “is easily described. To the north stretched one vast plain, which, except for a few mounds and a ruined mosque marking the site of one of the former towns of Sarakhs, was unbroken by tree, bush, mound, or undulations as far as the eye could reach. The ‘Tejend, it is true, winds round to the

* The italics are Sir Charles MacGregor’s. *Vide* “Narrative of a Journey through the Province of Khorassan and the N.W. Frontier of Afghanistan in 1875.” London : W. H. Allen & Co., 1879.

north-west, but its bed is low, below the level of the plain, and so nothing can be seen of it. It was a strange feeling to look out on this wild interminable expanse, and think that for an arc of 80° , there was not for 300 miles perhaps one single drop of water, or one human being. To the north-east lay the road to Merv stretched out beyond the dark tamarisk foliage in the bed of the Tejend. To the east all was clear: to the south-east were undulating rounded ridges (covered with little black dots which they told me were "pista" bushes)* extending towards the Murgháb. To the south was the Múzduran ridge we had come through, and a little way north of west was a confused mass of rugged ridges, among which I was informed lay the famed stronghold of the great Nadir."

This plain on the Tejend, then, is really the position of Sarakhs? That position Russia has taken and Russia holds. It is idle to argue that the position is valueless because she does not hold also the fort of Sarakhs. The fort of Sarakhs "has a garrison" (I quote again from MacGregor) "of one battalion of infantry, numbering some seven hundred men, eleven guns, good, bad, and indifferent, and a few horsemen; but the dimensions of the fort are such that it would take ten times this number to man the walls, even in the most inefficient manner." In a word, the Russians can walk into it whenever they may choose to do so!

MacGregor gives us, likewise, a plan and description of the fortress. He then adds:—"Were the Turkoman question for ever at rest"—Russia has settled it since he penned those words—"I see no reason why Sarakhs should not become a place of considerable importance as a large

* The Pistachio nut.

population could easily be supported by agriculture alone, and its convenient position with reference to Meshed and Herát on the south, and Khiva and Bokhára on the north, marks it out a future probable entrepôt of commerce." Further on, he adds : " Commercially, it is admirably situated for drawing to it all the trade between Turkistán on the north and Khorasán on the south ; and it has every advantage of soil and water and climate that would be necessary for these purposes."

On the same subject—the position of Sarakhs—let us study the description of the position as given by the correspondent of the *Illustrated London News*, in the issue of that paper of the 14th March :—

" Sarakhs, which the Russians were permitted to occupy soon after their conquest of Merv, and from which the understood line of Afghan boundary was to have been drawn eastward to the Oxus by the Joint Commission, consists of old and new Sarakhs, three miles and a half apart, situated on opposite sides of the Heri-rud, the bed of which, at that particular place, was dry at the season when the British Commission arrived there. This place belonged to Persia, but old Sarakhs, on the eastern side, was handed over to the Russians by the Persian Governor. When our Special Artist visited old Sarakhs, the Russian Governor-General of the Transcaspian Provinces, General Komaroff, was there, but only a few Russian troops, who were Akhal Turkomans recently enlisted in the Russian army. The sketch now given shows the remains of the old city, which is entirely deserted ; to the east and north there are a number of reed huts with a few people living in them. Old Sarakhs, as the sketch will show, is merely a square mound, rising high above the present level of the desert, and this mound is no doubt an accumulation of

rubbish formed by the destruction of houses and the rebuilding of them during a long course of time. The ruined walls of one building are all that stands of the old town ; the rest of the space is a mass of bricks and weeds. The walls are of burned brick, but are in a very crumbling state. The town itself evidently has not had an inhabitant for many years. On the north and east are the remains of crumbling mud walls, which may have been inhabited since the old city was left to decay. The old tomb seen to the right of this view is called Baba Ogle ; but there is a tradition that it is the tomb of Abel, the tomb of Cain being at new Sarakhs.

“ New Sarakhs, which is still occupied by the Persians, is on the western bank of the Heri-rud, 300 yards from the river bed. It is of late date, and is possessed of the usual mud walls, with towers. The wall encloses a space of 700 yards diameter. The governor, Ali Mardan Khan, who has to deal with the whole of the frontier of this part of Persia, lives in the town, and has four or five hundred troops. Although the walls cover a good amount of ground, there are very few people in the place. In the sketch, the mound of old Sarakhs is just visible in the distance ; in the foreground is one of the usual towers of refuge. Mr. Simpson made a separate sketch of the Meshed Gate of new Sarakhs, which shows the character of the crenelated walls and the towers. There are only two gates to the town—this gate, and another towards the north, called the Bokhára gate. Inside of the Meshed gate is the Arg, or citadel, where the governor lives, and the garrison have their quarters. A wall separates this from the other part of the town. There is a ditch perhaps 10 feet or 12 feet deep, and nearly 20 feet wide, round the walls, with a covered way, or *chemin de ronde*, between the wall and the ditch. There

are six small brass guns placed at various points, but the mud walls could offer no defence to a regular attack.

"A curious feature of the river above Sarakhs is the dam, or 'bund,' as it would be termed in India, at Kizil Koi, by which the water is diverted into streams for artificial irrigation. Kizil-Koi is eight miles higher up the river, between Sarakhs and Pul-i-Khátun. This dam, which is a very primitive affair, being made of wattles and earth, fills a water-course, which supplies old Sarakhs; and new Sarakhs receives its supply of water on the other side of the Heri-Rud from a point not far distant. All cultivation in this region is done by means of irrigation derived from rivers and Streams; and the protection of "water supply" is an important part of the frontier question. On the ordinary maps it will be seen that the Heriserai is on the Persian side of the bridge, standing on the right bank of the Kershef-Rud. The date of its erection is given as in Timour's time. The view taken by me is looking south, and the high hills forming the background are all on the Persian side. The Kershef-Rud is a small stream which enters the Heri-Rud on its left bank only a few yards below the bridge."

Let the reader realize the commercial and military advantages of this position; further, that the fortress resting on that position belongs to a prince who is virtually a vassal of Russia; further still, that the position, capable of a large development, lies by the valley of the Heri-rúd, 202 miles, by the alternative route along the Murgháb valley, a somewhat shorter distance, from Herát: that it is about 60 miles from Merv, and *that the routes from the two places to Herát, by the Murgháb valley, converge at Panjdeh*: let him realise all this, and then ask with surprise under what blind infatuation has the British Government per-

mitted the occupation of these two threatening positions, Merv and Sarakhs, by a colossal power which is advancing towards India, without making a corresponding forward movement from the Indus?

The consideration of this infatuation will form the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V.

THE INFATUATION OF GREAT BRITAIN.

THE Ministers of the Crown of Great Britain and Ireland are, or are supposed to be, the executors of the will of the people of these islands. However culpably ignorant and culpably inefficient a ministry may be, it is unfair then absolutely to condemn them if the people whom they represent absolve them. If the people of these islands are misgoverned, if they sanction a policy which tends to the loss of India, they have mainly themselves to blame. In describing "the infatuation of Great Britain" I shall describe a course of conduct which, though initiated by the minister, has been sanctioned by the people. It is to the people that I appeal. I tell them that that policy which they have sanctioned is risking the loss of their greatest dependency. I implore them not to be blinded by oratorical platitudes, but to look facts sternly in the face. I make this appeal not as a party-man, for it will be seen I blame both parties, but as an Englishman who loves his country and who feels that the empire which has been created by the valour, by the energy, by the skill, and by the devotion of our forefathers can only be maintained by the display of the same qualities by their descendants!

At the close of the third chapter I brought the action of the British Government up to the year 1869, the year in which, Samarkhand having been annexed and Bokhára controlled by Russia, Lord Clarendon made his famous proposition for constituting Afghánistán as a neutral zone, and

received in reply Prince Gortschakoff's assurance, that his master, the Czar, "looks upon Afghánistán as completely without the sphere in which Russia may be called upon to exercise her influence." I added, that on the Government of India objecting to an arrangement which would remove Afghánistán completely from the sphere of British influence, the negotiations with Russia were prolonged for two years, the Russian Government continuing to protest, by the mouth of its Chancellor, that "Russia had no intention of going further south," and that "extension of territory was extension of weakness." I shewed further that with these honied terms upon her lips Russia was, during those two years, preparing for the spring upon Khiva which she made in 1873. I now propose to resume the history of the recent negotiations of the Governments of Great Britain and India from the period, January 1869, when Sher Ali, having overcome all his rivals, became unquestioned ruler of Afghánistán.

In the autumn immediately preceding his decisive victory in January 1869 over his relative, Abdul Rahman, the victorious Amir, Sher Ali, believing his authority to be permanently established, requested the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjáb, Sir Donald Macleod, to inform the Viceroy—the late Lord Lawrence—that, in order to concert a good understanding between the two Governments it would be a satisfaction to himself if the Viceroy would meet him at Pesháwur or some other place on the frontier. The Viceroy was willing to grant the interview, and would have arranged it, but, before preliminaries could be settled, there occurred that invasion by Abdul Rahman, the repelling of which demanded all the energies of Sher Ali.

Two months after the decisive battle which confirmed Sher Ali on his throne Lord Lawrence left India. His successor, the Earl of Mayo, possessed the rare and difficult

gift of a thorough knowledge of his fellow-men. He was quick, beyond all men whom I have met, in reading character. This gift, joined to great decision and energy, would have made him under any circumstances a strong man. But, added to it, and gilding, as it were, all his actions, there was a singular charm of manner, which impressed everyone with whom he came in contact, and which was sure to exercise, and which did exercise, a remarkable influence over an Oriental people.

One of the first acts of the new Viceroy was to examine the relations existing between India, and the ruler of the mountainous region on its north-western border. Realising at once the importance of the interview which Sher Ali had solicited from his predecessor, Lord Mayo at once forwarded to him an invitation to meet him at Ambála. The invitation was accepted.

Sher Ali came to Ambála in the spring of 1869. Had the hands of Lord Mayo been free, it is quite possible that an arrangement might have been arrived at which would have prevented the second Afghan war and have rendered impossible Russian aggression. But Lord Mayo's hands were tied very tightly indeed. Shortly after his acceptance of the office of Viceroy, the Minister who had recommended him for that office had been displaced ; and there had come into power a Ministry upon whom a phrase invented by Lord Lawrence, the phrase "masterly inactivity," exercised a fascination which its very victims would find it now difficult to explain. The real meaning of this phrase, as interpreted by the action of those who adopted it, was that Russia might do as she pleased in Central Asia, provided she did not touch Afghánistán ; whilst British India should remain inactive, not encumbering herself with an offensive alliance with a power beyond its actual frontier, least of all with Afghánistán, and taking care to give no

pledge to support the dynasty of the actual ruler of that country.

If we bear in mind this fettered position of Lord Mayo, we shall easily recognize the greatness of the disappointment likely to accrue to the Amir Sher Ali. For Sher Ali had come to Ambála full of hope of obtaining the support which a dependent ruler has a right to expect from his suzerain. Sher Ali had come to Ambála hopeful of securing an offensive and defensive alliance with the Government of India. He desired a full assurance of protection against Russian aggression, the prospects of which, ever since the fall of Samarkhand, had filled him with apprehension. He wished to be assured, in a distinct and absolute manner, that the British would recognize as his successor, in his own lifetime, the son whom he was prepared to nominate. These were the cardinal aims which had prompted him to solicit an interview from Lord Lawrence, and which influenced him to accept the invitation of Lord Mayo. He had come to Ambála in the full hope that his wishes with respect to all of them would be gratified. Even we, who are behind the scenes, and who know how completely the hands of Lord Mayo were tied, cannot realize the full measure of the disappointment in store for him.

The charm of Lord Mayo's manner won indeed the heart of the man, but the spirit of his replies wounded to the quick the soul of the Amir. With respect to Sher Ali's demand for a specific promise of full protection against Russian aggression, Lord Mayo could reply only with the vague promise that "he would be strengthened from time to time as circumstances might seem to require;" that his applications for assistance would always be received "with consideration and respect." Nor, on the domestic question, was the answer he

received one whit more satisfactory to the Amír. He was not even solaced with a promise that he would be supported against any attempt which his rivals might make to unseat him. The utmost he could obtain was an assurance that any attempt on their part would be regarded by the British Government with "severe displeasure ;" whilst as to the recognition of his favourite son as his successor, although, with respect to that, he made—to use Lord Mayo's expression—"the most urgent and prominent demands ;" stated his earnest wish that the Government of India "should acknowledge not only himself, but his lineal descendants or successors in blood ;" and added that, if this were accorded "there was nothing he would not do to evince his gratitude," he was met, as far as Lord Mayo was concerned, by a reluctant "*non possumus !*"

Sher Ali returned to Kábul a sincere admirer and personal friend of Lord Mayo, but utterly disappointed with the political results of his journey. To all intents and purposes he was in a position, with respect to British support, but little better than that which he had occupied when he accepted the invitation. He vented his feelings in the bitter remark: "The English care only for themselves!"

Yet—and it is a remarkable result of the glamour exercised by those fatal words "masterly inactivity"—even the vague assurances of Lord Mayo had excited the alarm of the Ministry in England. The phrase used by the Viceroy that any application for assistance on the part of the Amir, would be received "with consideration and respect" was objected to by the Minister for India, on the ground that those words "may some day be construed by the Amir or by his successors as meaning more than, with those explanations"—*i.e.*, the verbal explanations given by Lord Mayo to the Amir—"they were intended to convey." The same Minister even wrote a despatch to the Viceroy,

in which, amongst other matters, he objected to the term "rightful rule" as applied to the rule of Sher Ali over Afghánistán !

Time went on. The Russian Government, after amusing for more than two years the British Ministry with vague and specious promises, struck at and captured Khiva, in 1873. The news of this capture reached Kábul in June of the same year. It filled the mind of the Amir with terror. The catastrophe which he had seen looming in the future at Ambála had come upon him. Khiva had followed Samarkhand. The turn of Afghánistán would follow. Full of these apprehensions he stretched out his hands to the Viceroy, telling him that the vague assurances of Ambála were insufficient for the present emergency, and desiring to know how far he might rely upon British help if he should be invaded.

It was, surely, a natural request, this solicitation from the commander of the outer bulwark of Hindustan to the ruler of the country which that bulwark covered. It was a request which should have received a sympathizing and reassuring reply.

The Viceroy of India was no longer Lord Mayo. That nobleman had been assassinated in the Andamans by a convict sentenced to penal servitude for murder, and had been succeeded by Lord Northbrook, a man whose cold unsympathizing manners and hard unimaginative nature were not calculated to conciliate.

Lord Northbrook did not feel empowered to reply to the message of the Amir, but referred it by telegram to the Ministry at home, the same Ministry which had adopted with respect to India the fatal principle summed up in the Lawrentian motto. The reply he received is worth recording as a specimen of the "masterly imbecility" which pervaded British councils in July 1873.

"Cabinet thinks," so ran the telegram, "you should inform Amir that we do not at all share his alarm, and consider there is no cause for it; but you may assure him we shall maintain our settled policy in favour of Afghánistán if he abides your advice in external affairs."

The Khanáte of Khiva annexed, and no cause for alarm! Surely that was cold comfort for a ruler who, on the spot, possessed the best means for judging! "We do not share his alarm." We—who have been duped by this very act of Russia; who were told that the expedition was a very little one, that far from its being the intention of the Czar to take Khiva, positive orders had been sent to prevent it; we, who, after the event, do not care to examine "too minutely how far these arrangements were in strict accordance with the assurances given in January;" we, who have been duped at every turn and who have been wrong in every forecast—we "do not at all share his alarm, and consider there is no cause for it!" Cold comfort that, I repeat, coming from such a quarter, for an anxious and alarmed ruler!

Cold comfort indeed Sher Ali found it. Such a message was calculated to confirm rather than to remove his fears, But he did not even then despair. He would place before the Governor-General, and, through him, before the British Government, facts which should speak, and he would make a final appeal to their justice and to their interests. In this intent, Sher Ali transmitted fresh instructions to an agent whom he had previously despatched to Simla, the summer residence of the Viceroy, a nobleman who enjoyed all his confidence, Saiad Nur Muhammad Sháh, urging him to press for certain definite concessions on the two matters which he himself had so strongly urged at Ambála, viz., the absolute assurance of support against Russia when he

should demand it, and the recognition of his favourite son as his successor.

Nur Muhammad Sháh carried out these instructions to the letter. He had had one interview with Lord Northbrook on the 12th July : a second was accorded to him on the 30th. So far as related to the calming of the apprehensions or satisfying the demands of the Amir these interviews were absolutely unproductive. Their result may be summed up in a letter addressed by order of the Viceroy to the Amir. In that letter the Amir was informed that whilst the Viceroy did not entertain any apprehension of danger to his Highness's dominions from without, yet that "the the British Government will endeavour from time to time, by such means as circumstances may require, to strengthen the Government of your Highness, to enable you to exercise with equity and justice your rightful rule, and to transmit to your descendants all the dignities and honours of which you are the lawful possessor." In the same letter *the Amir was reminded of the assurances given by Russia as to his country being quite beyond the sphere within which she was called upon to exercise her influence.* Basing his decision on that assurance, Lord Northbrook "postponed to a more convenient opportunity" the discussion of the measures to be taken in the event of an attack upon Afghánistán !

In the mind of Sher Ali this letter was a deathblow to all his expectations. Let us for a moment realize his position. He ruled the middle region between two colossal powers, England and Russia. Every reason, geographical position, personal feeling, his knowledge of the practical justice of her rule in India, prompted him to link his lot with the former. But Russia was advancing with giant strides. She was within striking distance of his eastern border at Samarkhand ; the capture of Khiva had ensured to her a

position which must sooner or later bring her on to his western frontier ; her agents were busy throughout Central Asia dwelling upon her power and boasting of her intentions ; he wished to be in a position to be able to defy alike her promises and her threats. In reply to his demand to be placed in such a position, he received only general assurances that he had no ground for his alarm.

That the Amir was right in construing as evasive the reply of Lord Northbrook is proved by the letter from that nobleman to the Secretary of State for India explaining its meaning. In that letter the Viceroy stated that the envoy of the Amir had been informed that “if, in the event of any aggression from without, British influence were invoked, and failed by negotiation to effect a satisfactory settlement, *IT WAS PROBABLE* that the British Government would afford the Amir material assistance in repelling an invader ; but that such assistance would be conditional on the Amir following the advice of the British Government, and having himself abstained from aggression.”

Observe : the above is the Viceroy's own interpretation of his own reply to the Amir ! Was it a reply calculated to reassure ? Was it a reply worthy of the occasion, worthy of a statesman ? Here was the commander of the outlying bulwark telling the Governor of the rich city which it covered that he dreaded the sudden attack of a subtle enemy, and begging for a definite assurance that he would be protected. In reply the Governor refuses to *promise* him protection : tells him only that if he were attacked negotiation would first be tried ; that then, if negotiation were to fail, there was—not a certainty let it be noted—but a *probability* that he would be protected : and that only if he were to comply with certain conditions !

Mark these conditions. The first : that he should follow the advice of the British Government : truly a hard con-

dition, for the British Government might have advised him to yield a Pul-i-Khátun or a Panjdeh in order to retain the remainder of his dominions. The second condition was harder still. "That he should himself have abstained from aggression." Nothing easier in words, nothing more difficult, in the presence of Russia, in practice. The straying of a few herdsmen across the border might be termed aggression. The history of Russia, and her connection with the states she has swallowed up, is a constant repetition of the story of the wolf and the lamb!

Looking back at that unhappy episode, I cannot believe that the most prominent British actors in it would care to defend it. The reply of the Viceroy was ungenerous, unstatesmanlike, and unworthy. It produced the only possible result which a clear-headed man could have anticipated from it. It alienated the Amir from England, and disposed him to receive with favour the advances of Russia. His sense of the unworthy tone of Lord Northbrook's letter, with its assurances of probable assistance in case he should be attacked, found vent in the sarcastic reply which he transmitted: "The friendly declaration of your Excellency," he wrote in November of the same year, "to the effect that you will maintain towards me the same policy which was followed by Lord Lawrence and by Lord Mayo, has been the cause of much gratification to me. My friend! Under these circumstances of the case it was not necessary to hold all those conversations with Saiad Nur Muhammad Sháh! The understanding arrived at at Ambála is quite sufficient"! From that moment his confidential correspondence with the Viceroy ceased. "I am determined," he said, "to receive no more favours from the British Government!"

Russia meanwhile was continuing her mole-like work in Central Asia. The fruit of this work was next seen in

February 1876, when she absorbed the remaining moiety of Khokand, permitting only the principality of Karatighin to retain a condition of semi-independence.

In the spring of that year Lord Lytton succeeded Lord Northbrook as Viceroy of India. The new Viceroy came out empowered by his Government to repair, if it were possible, the mischief which had been accomplished, by offering to the Amir the active support and protection, including the formal recognition of his dynasty, which he had previously vainly demanded at the hands of the British Government. But before Lord Lytton had been able to open communications with the Amir, certain events had happened which had confirmed that potentate in the hostile attitude which he had assumed after the mission of Saiad Nur Muhammad Sháh in 1873.

There had been a dispute of long standing between Afghánistán and Persia regarding certain lands in Sēistán, the south-western province of the former state. In the end both powers had agreed to refer the matter to the arbitration of England. Shortly before Lord Lytton landed in India, the arbitrators had given a decision very much in favour of Persia. This result of a difference in which he believed that all the right was on his side so embittered the Amir that, coming as it did after the Simla conferences, he attributed it to a settled design on the part of England to humiliate, to weaken, and to insult him.

The action of the Government of India in another matter on which he was extremely sensitive still further embittered the Amir against the British.

The son who had accompanied Sher Ali to Ambála in 1870, and on whose behalf he had pleaded to Lord Mayo, was his youngest boy, Abdúla Ján, born to him by his favourite wife. Popular sympathy had however been excited in Afghánistán and in India in favour of an elder son,

Yakúb Khán, at the time governor of Herát, and who was believed to be endowed with more than ordinary ability. This general impression as to the capacity of Yakúb Khán tended, in the belief of the Amir, to the disparagement of his favourite in public estimation. His first act, therefore, on his return from the Ambála conference, had been to entice Yahúb Khán to Kábul, and to throw him into a dungeon. This act was so far resented by the Government of India that it never failed to press upon the Amir it's opinion of the injustice and impolicy of his action, and to urge the release of the prisoner. This constant remonstrance, coming after all the Amir's requests had been denied, had engendered feelings which the decision regarding Sëistán increased to positive hatred.

The Amir was under the influence of this passion when Lord Lytton arrived in India. One of the first political acts of the new Viceroy was to despatch a native Aide-de-camp to Kábul with a message of reconciliation. But the evil had been done. Sher Ali had already taken his part. There were at the time Russian agents in Kábul, agents who readily promised what the English had refused, and who had therefore entire possession of his mind. Sher Ali declined then, ostentatiously, to receive the messenger of the Viceroy, and though the conciliatory language of Lord Lytton rendered it impossible for him to refuse the proposal that a conference between two duly-empowered envoys from the two courts should take place at Pesháwar, he took care to furnish his envoy with instructions which should render the negotiations fruitless.

The interview between the two negotiators took place at Pesháwar in the early part of 1877. England was represented on that occasion by Sir Lewis Pelly, a very distinguished officer, who, had some years before, made the journey, alone, wearing all the time the British uniform,

from Teheran to the British frontier, crossing a dangerous corner of Afghanistan, and who was thoroughly acquainted with the habits, language, and modes of thought of the people. To that able officer it soon became apparent that, since 1873, the rôles of the negociators had been inverted. In that year it had been the British Viceroy who had declined all the propositions of the Amir : in 1877, it was the representative of Kábul who refused his assent to the terms of accommodation and reconciliation set forth by the representative of the British Government. To such an extent did this proceed, so unaccommodating—even hostile—did the language of the Kábul envoy at last become, that the Viceroy wisely took advantage of the death of that nobleman to declare the conference at an end.

From that moment the Government of India, acting upon instructions from England, resolved “to maintain an attitude of vigilant reserve until such time as the Amir might better realize his own position and interests.” This policy was persevered in for twenty months. During that period the aggressive action of Russia continued to develop itself. There cannot be a doubt but that, had the negotiations between England and Russia in 1878 terminated in a rupture between the two powers, Russia was prepared to follow in the footsteps of Nádír Sháh—to threaten from the base of a friendly Afghánistán the empire of Hindustan. Under these circumstances, it was not possible that the British Government should remain quiescent, when—a breach between Russia and England seeming to be a question not of days but of hours—the Amir received with remarkable ostentation an embassy despatched to him by the Czar !

Yet though it was impossible that the British Government should allow to pass without notice an act which

constituted a breach of the engagement existing between itself and the Amir—the engagement made between Dost Muhammed and Mr. John Lawrence in 1854, accepted by Sher Ali on his accession, confirmed by him at Ambála in 1870, and never subsequently abrogated—the engagement that he would be “the friend of the friends and the enemy of the enemies” of the British Government—the notice which the Viceroy did take of it was remarkable for its moderation. Lord Lytton simply required that the Amir, having welcomed an embassy from the Czar, should receive in his capital an embassy from the Viceroy of British India. He informed the Amir at the same time that his refusal would be construed as an unfriendly, even as a hostile, act.

The conduct of Sher Ali on receiving the friendly letter containing this proposal from the Viceroy was more than discourteous. Not only did he vouchsafe to it no reply, but he directed the officer commanding the advanced posts in the direction of the British frontier to refuse admission to the British envoy and his retinue, and, if necessary, to repel him by force!

The Viceroy, meanwhile, had directed the distinguished officer whom he had nominated to be envoy—General Sir Neville Chamberlain—to proceed on his mission. But when Chamberlain attempted to enter the Khaibar pass he found its heights occupied by the army of the Amir. He was, in fact, refused admittance!

The position had now become very strained. Lord Lytton had to consider that the mountainous region covering the north-western frontier of the empire of which he was Viceroy, a region upon the maintenance of which the predecessors of the English, the Mogols, had always insisted, which covers all the passes through which invaders of India have passed and must pass, and the pos-

session of which by Russia would leave India at the mercy of Russia, was now held by an Amir who, spurning his offers, had consented to be the vassal of Russia. He had to consider that every move of the Amir, his hostile attitude, his refusal to receive his envoy, had been dictated by the Russian guests whom he was entertaining at his capital, and that these might at any moment suggest action which would for ever paralyze British interests. There was a strong Russian force at Samarkhand, and there were detachments between that city and Kábul. If these were to be called up, the situation would become extremely perilous.

Reluctant, however, to proceed to extremities, Lord Lytton resolved to afford the Amir one more opportunity to return to a better mind. He wrote to him, then, to the effect that a marked insult had been offered to the envoy whom he had ordered to proceed on a complimentary visit to his capital; that he trusted the Amir would, upon reflection, realize that such action was not in accordance with friendly relations between two neighbouring nations: that, if deliberately intended, it was a hostile act; but that in the hope that it was not deliberately intended the Viceroy was glad to give the Amir the opportunity of disavowing it, or, if it had been done by his express orders, of now expressing his regret for the same. Lord Lytton added, that unless a satisfactory reply were received before the 20th November he should be forced to regard the insult as deliberate and intentional, and that he should treat the Amir as an enemy.

The date, the 20th November, fixed for the receipt of the reply, allowed the Amir six clear days to consider his position. On the 19th he penned a reply—a reply as evasive and unsatisfactory as the communication he had received in 1873 from Lord Northbrook. This reply did

not however reach the Viceroy till many days after the date he had mentioned. On that date hostilities had commenced.

Such was the origin of the second Afghán war. A hard and unelastic principle of policy, the principle thoroughly expressed in the words "masterly inactivity" applied to it by its authors, designed in its origin to deal with an Afghánistán bounded on the north and north-west by wild and independent tribes, had been rigorously applied to an Afghánistán watching with beating heart the steady absorption of those independent tribes by the great Northern Power which since 1859 had been no longer held back by the barriers of the Caucasus. In her fear and her agony Afghánistán had appealed to the Power of which she herself constituted the outer bulwark—she had appealed to the British rulers of Hindustán. In her appeal to those rulers she pointed to the fact that one kingdom on her north-eastern border had been virtually swallowed up; that but one month had elapsed since another kingdom, beyond her north-western frontier, had been suddenly and without warning annexed; that she was now threatened; and she asked alike for sympathy and assistance. Both were refused. An empire might be lost, but the principle of a hallowed phrase was not to be infringed. The rulers of England, but just awakening to the conviction that, in the matter of Khiva, they had been deliberately tricked and deceived by Russia, professed their willingness to be deceived once again, to believe pledges made only to be broken, to trust in promises which were violated before the paper had absorbed the ink with which they were written. They answered then the entreaties of Afghánistán with a complacent assurance that they did not share her alarm; that, if she were attacked by Russia, and if, then, the negotiators of England failed to induce that power to

desist, it was "probable" that they would assist Afghánistán with troops, provided always it were made clear to them that her ruler would follow their advice and that Afghánistán "had abstained from aggression"! Well might the Amir remark "the goat attacks not the panther;" well might he declare his determination to receive no more favours from the English! Can we wonder that, baffled in his hopes, as he knew himself to be, fooled, as he believed himself to be, he should take an early opportunity to defy his former protector, and throw himself into the arms of England's enemy? Between two colossal powers, one of whom was profuse of promises, the other cold and unsympathetic, it was surely natural that he should prefer the former!

The second Afghán war, then, was the natural outcome of the repellant policy of 1873. It devolved upon Lord Lytton to carry it out. He had a great opportunity. In the Indian army he possessed, in 1878, an unsurpassed material, and he was gifted with the power of taking accurate stock of the men with whom he was brought into contact. It was the perception of Lord Lytton that gave to Sir Frederick Roberts the opportunity which brought him speedily to the very foremost rank. Side by side with Roberts were such men as Charles MacGregor, Donald Stewart, James Hills, not to speak—for the list is a long one—of very many others. The Sikh and Gúrkah regiments were well-drilled and disciplined and eager for a forward movement. The cavalry, the artillery, the commissariat, were thoroughly organized and ready for the campaign. Whilst Lord Lytton, then, had a splendid opportunity, he possessed ample means for using that opportunity, for settling for ever the Russo-Afghan question. That he did not settle it is clear. How was it then that he failed?

The fault was not the fault of Lord Lytton. In the part which devolved upon him he had done all that was possible. He had chosen the right men and supplied them with the best materials. A civilian, even though he were Viceroy, could do no more. The results justified his anticipations. The second Afghan war had begun the 20th of November, 1878. In May of the year following Yakúb Khán, son and successor of Amir Sher Ali, who had died, entered the British camp a suppliant for peace !

That event gave the British Government the long-desired opportunity. In a speech made at the Lord Mayor's banquet in November 1878, Lord Beaconsfield had declared that the main object of the armed intervention in Afghánistán was to obtain "a scientific frontier." Like all the phrases used by that distinguished statesman when he wished to emphasise a particular line of action, the phrase caught the public ear and was repeated all over the country. Not every one, however, asked himself or cared to ask others what it really meant. The phrase was so sonorous and expressive that the general public was content to accept it without inquiry.

There were, however, some who examined more closely its real meaning. Amongst these was the gallant soldier and distinguished strategist from whose lecture in 1884 I have quoted in a previous chapter, Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Hamley.

To Sir Edward Hamley the phrase could have but one significance. To him a scientific frontier meant a strategical frontier—a frontier, which, making India safe against every chance of invasion, should allow the races behind it's line to live undisturbed by continual scares. Was such a frontier possible for India? To give an answer to that question Hamley applied to the study of the subject a mind singularly clear and well-stored. When he had

thoroughly mastered it, he, in response to a request made to him by the Council of the Royal United Service Institution, delivered his views on the 13th of December, 1878, to a large and distinguished audience assembled in its theatre.

Never did Sir E. Hamley more completely vindicate his title to the character of strategist than on this memorable occasion. He depicted, with a master's hand, the conditions of the Indian frontier; showed that the line of the Indus was no real barrier against invasion; that, if proper precautions were taken on the Pesháwar plain, we need not be apprehensive regarding an invasion through the Khaibar pass; that neither the Khuram Pass, nor the Gomal, need inspire us with serious alarm; but that between Kandahar and the Indus were plains of remarkable fertility which could subsist an enemy's army until its general should choose the opportune moment and the easiest point when and where to cross the Indus. He came to the definite conclusion, then, that we should occupy the salient angle which covered that country and all the passes leading into India behind it. That salient angle was represented by Kandahar. "I have endeavoured," said Sir Edward, in concluding a lecture which will prove to after ages that there was at least one English soldier who thoroughly understood the position, "to sketch a definite plan upon which to concentrate our resources, and by which to secure a scientific frontier, and a permanent settlement of this large question. Looking at the northern half of this part of our territory, I think we should be thankful for possessing a frontier so easily rendered impregnable. Looking at the southern half, we have no less reason to be thankful for having acquired, in Quetta, such means of vigorous and effective action, and such an opportunity of securing new advantages of the most important

and decisive kind. With a garrison strongly posted in its lines at Kandahar, with all the routes and stages by which our forces might be assembled on that point, all sources of supply, and all arrangements for transport, laid down, as our trained staff officers are certainly capable of laying them down, we might view calmly any possible complications before us, whether arising from the augmented military power of Russia in the East, from the success of her intrigues, or from her open hostility. The grounds of our assurance would be manifest and easily understood, our native subjects would soon learn to appreciate them, and what would be security for us would be tranquillity for India."

Speaking on the same subject, two years later, at the *Royal Geographical Society*, an officer of Engineers, distinguished for his attainments and who had visited the country, thus supported Sir E. Hamley's view :—

"From a commercial, political, or military point of view," said Captain Holdich, "Kandahar is the most important point in Afghánistán; geographically it may be said to indicate the weak point of the Afghán frontier. There is no Hindu Kush between Kandahar and the north-west, nor is the distribution of the hill country round Kandahar of such a nature, or such an extent, as that which enabled the tribes of the north to make so formidable an opposition to us last winter.

"The broad open plains which surround Kandahar are not well suited to Afghán tactics. Whatever difficulty we may have in dealing with a foe whose strength lies chiefly in his power of scattering, or concentrating, as the case may be, by making use of mountain tracts and unknown hill paths, vanishes when the country becomes flat and open. To hold Kábul would mean to hold an extensive line of hills round Kábul. To hold Kandahar means very

little more than retaining command of the walls and citadel. The chief wealth of Afghánistán too is certainly concentrated in Kandahar and Herát. Compared to Kandahar, Kábul is but an arsenal, and a convenient strategical point from which to govern the turbulent northern tribes. It is not a centre of trade in any sense, nor has it the command of such grand trade routes as Kandahar possesses. But Kandahar lies just as easily open to approach from one side as from another."

This, then, was the real scientific frontier—the extension of the British frontier to Kandahar, the annexation of the undulating Chatiali plateau behind Tal, and of the Pishin valley. The fortifications of Kandahar to be strengthened and that place united by rail with Girishk, Farah, and Herát, which last place should be placed virtually under British protection.

I have said "to Kandahar ;" but the occupation of that town should include the occupation of the country as far as the Helmund. "When we speak," said Sir E. Hamley, on a subsequent occasion—

"Of occupying Kandahar, it is not merely the city that is meant. To hold a city against a besieger bringing modern artillery to bear on it, is to doom it to ruin, its inhabitants to destruction. Positions must be held at a distance—in this case up to the line of the Helmund. These positions, in order to draw from them their full advantage against such forces as the Russians could bring on us, should be carefully fortified with earth-works, and armed with artillery more powerful than could follow the march of an invader. Sir Michael Biddulph, in a valuable report made from personal observation during the last Afghan war, says, 'The position of Girishk is with the most modest precaution unassailable—all the passages of the Helmund can be defended by suitable works at

short notice.' This being the first line, he describes a second strong line behind it—and a third, if necessary, is to be found, he says, on an arc extending from the edge of the desert. 'Inside this arc,' he goes on, 'lies all the productive country, while without it the country is sterile and an open glaxis.' 'It seems to me,' he adds, 'that even though invasion may be remote, the possession of this point has an importance which cannot be rated too highly.' It is upon the Helmund, then, that we must direct our march, if we occupy Kandahar. And if we do not occupy it, we can never be certain that Russia will not anticipate us on the Helmund."

Now, when in May, 1879, Yakúb Khán entered the British camp at Gandamak to accept any terms which the British Government might offer, the obtaining of the strategical frontier described by Sir Edward Hamley was easy. We had but to ask for it to get it. That we did not obtain it was more the fault of the Ministry in Downing Street than of Lord Lytton.

If Lord Lytton had proposed such a frontier the Cabinet doubtless would have supported him. Lord Lytton did not propose it, because, being a civilian, he had to depend for his strategical plans on the military advisers at his elbow, and amongst those advisers there was not one who was possessed of practical strategic knowledge.

I do not refer to men like Roberts, MacGregor, Stewart, or Hills. They were with the army in the field. But, at Simla, Lord Lytton was surrounded by theorists, each of whom had his favourite plan—plans built not, as was Hamley's, upon knowledge and argument, but upon reasons which the supporter would have found it difficult to maintain before a critical assembly of experts. To put the matter tersely and clearly, it was Lord Lytton's painful task to have to select from a number of plans, all of them incongruous

and defective, the plan which he deemed the least harmful.

It is possible—I do not know—but it is possible he may have been hampered by the Home Government. Certainly it was in the power of the Home Government either to force a plan upon him or reject and alter any which he might propose. Whether they did so or not I cannot say. At any rate they must bear the responsibility.

Now that the Cabinet which ruled the British empire between 1874 and 1880 had clear minds regarding the “scientific frontier” which its brilliant chief desired to secure it is impossible to assert. It is most painful to me to be obliged to admit that, not only had its members no clear views, but they had no definite ideas whatever on the subject. This was patent up to the last moment of their remaining in power. They adopted a right principle and an intelligent policy only from the moment when they were relegated to the cold shade of opposition.

Regarding “the scientific frontier,” the Cabinet of 1879 had ideas, I have said, neither clear nor definite; and they had, moreover, no competent military adviser to inspire them. Not indeed, because there were not military advisers at their elbow. The lecture of Sir Edward Hamley had been delivered to a very distinguished and a very critical audience, had been spoken of on the very evening of its delivery in the House of Commons, had been noticed in the leading articles of our daily newspapers, and had attracted an extraordinary amount of attention. Wisdom had cried aloud in the streets, but the members of the Cabinet had shut their ears!

The fact is, that in all matters relating to the Afghan question the Cabinet of 1874–80 floundered from first to last. Succeeding a Cabinet which had adopted and persistently acted upon the fatal principle expressed by the

words "masterly inactivity," the Cabinet of 1874 resembled, in its Indian policy, a man who knew that if he were to stand still he would die, but who was afraid to move forward lest he should stumble into a bog. And that expresses exactly what this Cabinet did do. Although Sir Edward Hamley held up a lantern to shew them the solid path along which they might tread with security, their fears whispered that the light of his lantern was the light of a will-o'-the-wisp: they took then a step in an opposite direction, and suffered the catastrophe I have mentioned.

For the "scientific frontier" obtained by the Treaty of Gandamak was, in very deed, the work of unscientific men. It was a delusion and a snare. It gave India a frontier a thousand times more unreliable than the frontier which it had abandoned to obtain it. It gave us the Khaibar Pass, when we were far better off in the valley of the Indus ready to receive an enemy emerging from that pass; it gave us the Khurm valley, the occupation of which would have isolated a portion of our army: it's one solitary merit was the acquisition of the valley of Pishin.

It did not last long. We acquired it absolutely, that is, the treaty which gave it to us was ratified, the 30th May; the gallant Cavagnari was murdered on the 4th September. Three months of existence were ample for so grotesque an abortion! It's early death, followed though it was by a renewal of the war, was a blessing for which the authors of its existence ought to be for ever thankful!

Two days after the murder of Cavagnari, Roberts, the most brilliant, the most daring, the most accomplished of generals, commenced the war. Of such a man, of such men as Hamley, as Charles MacGregor, and as Hills, it is inspiring to write. But that task is now denied me. I have to deal only with the results of the campaign. It is

however, at least satisfactory to know that such men still survive for the service of Great Britain.

The war thus re-commenced continued till the close of 1880. Eastern Afghánistán, or Kabulistán, had been evacuated the 11th August, and the rule over that portion of the country conferred upon Abdul Rahmán, the relative whom Sher Ali had defeated and driven into exile in January, 1869, and who had since that time been living in Bokhára, a pensioner of Russia. But in what is generally called western Afghánistán, that is, in the country about Kandahar and from Kandahar northwards the war continued some time longer. Holding, as I do, with General Hamley, that there was no necessity whatever to interfere in eastern Afghánistán; that the true interests of England were bound up in the line from Quetta to Kandahar and from Kandahar to Herát; that that is the line which, to bar Russian invasion, we have to occupy and secure, I shall confine my comments to the action of the British Government on that line.

The renewal of the war had given the Conservative Cabinet another chance. After the collapse of the Treaty of Gandamak, some dim light of the truth of Sir Edward Hamley's arguments would seem to have removed a portion of the fog which had obscured their reason. The apprehension stole upon them that the Kandahar line might, after all, be the true line. If we were to judge only from their after conduct when in opposition we might even believe that the apprehension grew into conviction. If that were so, they were more worthy of condemnation than if their vision had remained clouded. For this at least is certain, they never rose to the height of the situation. They showed themselves painfully wanting in accurate knowledge, in decision, in that quality which will cover a multitude of minor sins, in pluck. Having Kandahar in their possession,

convinced as we must suppose they were convinced, of its enormous importance—for, subsequently, they all voted for Lord Lytton's motion for its retention, in the House of Lords, and for Mr. Stanhope's motion in the House of Commons (March, 1881)—they had not the courage to put their foot down and say "possessing this important place, this place so necessary to the safety of India, we will keep it." No—they adopted one of those half-measures which are the bane of true statesmanship—such a half-measure as the elder Pitt would have spurned and Palmerston would have derided—they placed there in supreme authority a cousin of the late Amir, a man likewise named Sher Ali, who under the name of "Wali" or more properly, "Vali," was to conduct the civil administration of the districts dependent upon the city. For all the good that this appointment caused, the Government might as well have stuck up a lay figure. The people in the country covered by Kandahar were longing for the British rule: they came in crowds to the political officer in charge of the Chatiali district to implore it. A bold announcement that England had advanced her frontier as far as Kandahar would have had an immense influence for good. The appointment of the "Vali" shewed to the populations that there was still a chance of their being relegated to the hated rule of Kábul. Nor, whilst thus productive of evil, was the measure accompanied by any corresponding advantage. From first to last the "Váli" remained what I have said he might as well have been—a lay figure. On the first important disturbance, 14th July, 1880, his troops deserted and he collapsed, though he did not actually disappear till the following December!

The collapse of the "Vali" was a result second only, in the beneficial chances which it offered to Great Britain, to the disappearance of the treaty of Gandamak. Like

that fortunate collapse, it gave England another chance to retrieve her political errors—to secure a really scientific frontier.

But, before that chance offered, a change had occurred in the guidance of the political destinies of Great Britain. The Ministry which had desired “a scientific frontier” had gone out, and the advocates of “masterly inactivity” had come in. The men who had composed the retiring Cabinet recovered their senses and their courage only with the first inhaling of the opposition breeze. It was, indeed, high time that they should recover both. If it be true, as was stated in January, 1880, and has been repeated without contradiction over and over again since that date, that in that month they were treating with Persia for the transfer to that power of the important city and district of Herat, they must have been absolutely on the verge of imbecility. Why, it was to prevent the consummation of such an event that Lord Palmerston planned the first Afghan war, and that he made war on Persia in 1856! And, in spite of that, a Conservative Ministry actually debated whether, to relieve themselves of responsibility, it were not advisable to do that which the greatest foreign minister—I might almost say, the only foreign minister—of this century had waged two wars to prevent! Did they ask themselves for a moment what such a transfer would mean; that the handing over of Herat to Persia would signify the handing over of Herat to Russia? If, in their forgetfulness or neglect of history, they had doubted then, can they doubt now? Does not the fate of old Sarakhs read a lesson? Has the occupation of Pul-Kishti and of the Zulfagar Pass, and the threat to occupy Panjdeh—places far beyond the frontier accepted by Russia in 1872 and never till now repudiated—not opened their eyes? Or, is it a fact, that if Russia were to occupy

to-morrow the hill which is said to command Herát, a terrified English Ministry, and an ignorant and gullible British public would readily swallow the excuse that there was a new Herát as well as an old Herát, and that Russia had only taken the latter?

If the Conservative Cabinet had transferred Herát to Persia, they would have deserved impeachment. But the conduct of its members since they have been in opposition has been so much more bold and decided on all matters affecting the frontier policy of India that I am willing to hope, even to believe, that the idea, if seriously discussed at all, was discussed only to be dismissed. But, before I advert more fully to the true conception of the national interests which has guided them in opposition I must notice the action of their successors which caused it.

The Afghan war was still unfinished when the "masterly inactivity" party returned to power. To them it had been, and was, gall and wormwood. But the defeat at Maiwand and the subsequent leaguer of Kandahar by Ayub Khan had placed them in the, to them, extremely painful position of being forced to continue the war. From this painful position they were rescued by Sir Frederick Roberts, whose brilliant march and subsequent decisive victory will ever remain one of the most cherished records in the military history of Great Britain. This victory concluded the war.

Still Kandahar was in our hands, and we might easily have made it a condition with the new Amir whom we had placed in authority, that we should hold it. The reader must bear in mind that the question came up for the last time in the year 1880-1, at the time that Skobelev was preparing the expedition which subdued the Akhal Turkomans. The idea then occurred to me that if those splendid warriors were subdued, and we should, in the very same year, evacuate the frontier fortress which covered

all the western passes into Hindustan, the easily impressed peoples of India would not fail to imbibe the idea, not only that England was retiring before Russia, but that, from fear of Russia, she had left open the one gap in her frontier line, through which the invaders of India from the north had always advanced. To test the correctness of these ideas I visited India, and spent nearly three winter months there, from November to the third week of January, 1880-1. Thirty-five years of previous residence in all parts of the country had made me acquainted with most of its representative men, and I had little difficulty in inducing them to speak frankly with me on the subject.

I found, amongst all classes, among Muhammadans as well as among Hindus, a remarkable agreement of opinion. They all condemned the abandonment of Kandahar as likely to cause the people of India to lose confidence in the stability of British rule. "Nádir Sháh came by that route" they said, "and though Kandahar stopped him for a year, nothing stopped him after he had taken that place. Russia will of course conquer the Turkomans. And then Russia will be in the place of Nádir Sháh. If you leave Kandahar, you will leave open a gap by which Russia will easily enter. The native princes, men like Scindiah and Holkar, know that as well as you do. They bear your rule because if you were not here they would fight amongst themselves, and they know you can defend them and maintain order. But if they once think that a greater than you is coming, and they will think so if you deliberately leave the gate open for him to come, the hope of gaining something out of a general scrimmage will pervade their minds, and when you send your army to meet Russia on the Indus, they will strike for independence in your rear."

Such was the general opinion expressed to me by the Natives of India, who, in my judgment, were best capa-

ble of gauging the views of their countrymen. Shortly after my return to England I embodied, at the request of the members of the Constitutional Union, my experiences in the form of a lecture, which I delivered in February or March of 1881 to a large audience in St. James's Hall. I am bound to add that the Conservative party had long before become alive to the necessity, in the interests of the Empire, of retaining Kandahar as the new frontier. Lord Lytton had in the meanwhile returned home, and, I cannot doubt, had expressed very freely his views on the subject. This, at least, is certain, that the idea of the retention of Kandahar was adopted by the Conservative opposition, and was made the main theme of their platform speeches during the autumn of 1880, and the first ten weeks of 1881.

It soon transpired, however, that the Ministry of "masterly inactivity" had no idea of retaining the place. It is curious, looking back from the status of accomplished facts, writing in the third week of this month of March, 1885, when Russia possesses Sarakhs and Merv, and has advanced to Pul-i-Khátun and Zulfagar, within the Herát territory and within striking distance of the city of that name—it is curious, I say, to notice the reasons given by the authorities whom they quoted, upon which the Ministry relied to justify their retrograde movement. The most valued of these authorities, General Sir Henry Norman, arguing, in a memorandum dated 20th September, 1880, against the retention of Kandahar, thus expressed himself: "*The probability of our having to struggle for Herát, or to defend India from Kandahar, is so remote that its possibility is hardly worth considering.*" Wonderful forecast! The time so remote as to be hardly worth considering has narrowed itself to a term of less than five years! Sir Evelyn Baring, another expert of the masterly

inactivity school, was equally sceptical. Then there was the new Viceroy, Lord Ripon, whose experience of rather less than one year was so valuable : and, last not least, there was that eminent Russomane—the Prime Minister. “I have no fear myself,” had said that high authority, on November 27, 1879, “of the territorial extensions of Russia, no fear of them whatever. I think such fears are only old women’s fears.” Possibly some of the constituents and many of the friends, perhaps even some of the colleagues of Mr. Gladstone, regard now that remark as a libel upon old women !

The question was debated in the House of Lords, on the motion of Lord Lytton, on the 5th March, 1881. There the motion for the retention of Kandahar was carried by a majority of 89 (165 against 76). In the House of Commons, after a debate of two nights, a similar motion was defeated (26th March) by a majority of 120 (336 against 216). Of the motives which influenced some at least of the members of that majority I have a word or two to say.

On the evening on which the division was to take place, the 26th March, I happened to be dining at a Club of which I am not a member. Before I sat down, my host informed me that a friend of his, a Liberal Member of Parliament, was very anxious to speak to me on the subject which was then engrossing the attention of the House, and that he would come over, if I did not mind, at 10 o’clock, for that purpose. I at once cordially assented. At 10 o’clock the member came over, was introduced to me, and began questioning me about Kandahar. After I had answered all his questions the Member thus addressed me :—“Colonel Malleson, I had previously read all you had written ; I have now heard all you have to say on the subject of the abandonment of Kandahar : I have no

hesitation in telling you that I agree with you to the fullest extent, absolutely and entirely: I am satisfied that if we abandon Kandahar we shall have to fight Russia on the frontier for our Indian empire, and it is quite upon the cards that we may be at the same time struggling with the native princes within its borders. Holding as I do these opinions, you will be surprised to hear that it is my intention to-night to vote for the abandonment of Kandahar!"

Complètement taken aback by this conclusion, so opposed to the preamble of the Member's speech, I could only exclaim:—"Good God, Sir, have you got a conscience?"

The Member, in no way abashed by an exclamation which he probably expected, replied at once with a jaunty air:—"Conscience! Yes I have a conscience, and I'll tell you how it moves me to-night. Shortly after I had taken my seat for the first time in the House of Commons, a friend, who had been many years a member, came up to me, and congratulating me on being there, expressed a hope that I would keep my seat as many years as he had kept his: he added that I would keep it, too, if I would only adopt the plan which he had marked out for himself, and invariably followed. I asked my friend to tell me his plan. 'Why' he replied 'it is simply this. Never make a speech, never give a vote, in this House, without first asking yourself, on your conscience,'—mind you, he used the word conscience—'whether that speech or that vote will imperil your return at the next election.' Now," added the Member, "I have a very shrewd idea that if I were to vote in favour of the retention of Kandahar I should imperil my seat at the next election: therefore I am going down to vote against it. And I can tell you," he added, "there are at least fifty, probably seventy or eighty, members of our party who agree with me as to the necessity of retaining Kandahar, but who, actuated by the

motives which actuate me, will vote for its abandonment."

Comment on this story is unnecessary. It is one of the saddest signs of the times that on questions affecting the welfare of Great Britain conscience is often dead !

Kandahar was abandoned. The very rails which the energy of Sir Richard Temple had collected near Sibi to continue the railway from Nari—just beyond Sibi—to Quetta and thence to Kandahar were sold as old iron at a loss, according to the Blue Books, of more than half a million sterling !

But Time is rightly called the avenger. The news of the progress made by Russia along the northern frontier of Persian Khorásán induced even the representatives of the masterly inactivity party to repair some of the evil which had been effected. Quietly and unostentatiously new rails were sent to Sibi, and large gangs were set to labour at the earth-way. It was resolved in fact to carry out the original plan of continuing the railway to Quetta, and, it is to be hoped, to Kandahar. Efforts were made similarly to induce the Amir, Abdul Rahman, to believe that the British were really his friends. He was assured, in terms far more positive and direct than those which were employed towards Sher Ali in 1873, that should Russia venture to invade his dominions he would receive strong and efficient support : that England recognized it as a duty devolving upon her to insist upon Russia adhering to her famous declaration in 1869, that "Afghánistán was completely without the sphere in which that power was called upon to exercise her influence." If England had at the same time put her foot down—if she had responded to the move of Russia upon Sarakhs by declaring that the crossing by that Power of the frontier line from that place by Robat-Abdullah Khan and above Andkhoi to Koja Saleh would

mean war, we might have had no such disturbance as that which now exists. But once again was the Cabinet too soft. In reply to the plea of Russia that no proper frontier of the country comprised under the geographical term Afghánistán, existed, she agreed last year to despatch a Commission to mark out with precision, in conjunction with a Commission sent from Russia, the line which should thenceforward be recognized as the frontier across which Russia was not to advance. The line so marked was to be the dividing line between Trans-Caspian Russia and an Afghanistan subsidised by England.

CHAPTER VII.

RUSSIA'S LAST MOVE AND ENGLAND'S REPLY.

IN justice, there should have been no question regarding the frontier of Afghánistán. I have already related that, when in 1869 Prince Gortschakoff informed Lord Granville that his master, the Czar, regarded Afghánistán as entirely without the sphere in which Russia would be called upon to exercise her influence, it was further agreed that all the countries in the effective possession of the Amír Sher Ali, and which had formerly recognized the sovereignty of Dost Muhammad, should be embraced under that name. Finally, after waiting for a report on the subject from General Kaufman which never came, Lord Granville wrote a despatch to Lord Augustus Loftus, in October, 1872, for communication to the Russian Government, in which he stated that not having received any letter on the subject from that Government, the Cabinet had decided to consider the undermentioned provinces as constituting the frontier provinces of Afghánistán :—(1) Badakhshán, with its dependent district of Vakhán, from the Sarikul (Wood's Lake) on the east, to the junction of the Kotcha river with the Oxus (or Peiya) forming the northern boundary of this Afghán province through its entire extent. (2) Afghán Turkistán, comprising the districts of Kunduz, Khulm, and Balkh, the northern boundary of which would be the line of the Oxus from the junction of the Kotcha river to the port of Khoja Saleh inclusive, on the high road from Bokhára to Balkh ; nothing

to be claimed by the Amír on the left bank of the Oxus below Khoja Saleh. (3) The internal districts of Aksha, Seripul, Maimené, Shibberjan and Andkhoi, the latter of which would be the extreme Afghán frontier possession to the north-west, the desert beyond belonging to independent tribes of Turkomans. (4) The western Afghán frontier, a straight line from Khoja Saleh on the Oxus to Sarakhs on the Persian frontier. This line passed above Andkhoi and Gulu Bulu to Robat-Abdullah Khán on the Murgháb, thence by Imam Baksh to the Tejend, close to the town, on the other side of that river, of Sarakhs. Russia accepted that frontier in despatches dated respectively in December of that, and in January of the following, year. From that date to 1884, that frontier has never been questioned by that country. It has appeared on all the Russian maps. Even Schuyler speaks of it as well known and not needing further definition.

No questions, I repeat, were raised by Russia regarding this frontier till 1884. It was only when, in that year, the acquisition of Merv and Sarakhs brought her upon it that, in order to have a pretext for overleaping it, she suggested the proposal referred to in the last chapter. Russia would not have been true to her immemorial policy if, on approaching a new border, she had not at once raised doubts as to its validity. To solve those doubts, both countries engaged to send commissioners to the debated ground.

Though Russia agreed to this arrangement there are many reasons for believing that she did it solely to gain time, and with a determination not to act upon it. If she had any designs upon British India, the delineation of a frontier which she must respect would interfere very much with the use of those insidious means which had ever marked her stealthy progress. The sending troops across a frontier recognized by herself and guaranteed by England to the

Amír, would mean war with England as well as war with the Amír. She would be effectually prevented from justifying a forward spring by the use of such quibbles as she had employed regarding Sarakhs. At the same time she was not quite ready for war. Her Transcaspian railway, pushed on though it had been with the zeal of a Power which feels that it has a mission to fulfil, had not yet reached the required point. Other preparations were likewise not so forward as they might have been. Still she could not refuse to promise to co-operate in a plan so fair. We may fairly conclude from her subsequent conduct that she made that promise with a secret resolve to break it.

For, whilst Great Britain, true to her word, despatched, in the autumn of 1884, an English Commission, headed by an officer who had filled high positions in India; while that officer and his suite proceeded by way of Persia to the appointed place of rendezvous, Russia sent no one. For once, too, she had no excuses but the poorest to offer. Such as she did make reminded the British public of the taunting apologies suggested by the Prophet Elijah to the prophets of Baal for the absence of any manifestation on the part of their divinity. "Where is General Zelenoy?" asked the British public. "We do not quite know," answered Russia; "either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awakened." At all events he did not come to time.

Whilst the British Commissioner, Sir Peter Lumsden, and his escort, were waiting for his Russian colleague, General Zelenoy, the Russian commanders at Sarakhs and Merv determined to solve the question of the boundary by despatching small bodies of troops into the territory claimed and occupied by the Afgháns. If the reader will glance at any good map of the country immediately to the north-west of the Paropamisian range he will see marked,

on the river Heri-rúd, at a point where the Keshef-rúd joins that river, the name of Pul-i-Khátun.* The Heri-rúd, whether under its own name or as the Tejend, constitutes to the south and to the north-west as far as Sarakhs the boundary of the province of Herát. The principal of the posts on its banks as it flows northward are Kuhsan, the Zulfagar pass, and Pul-i-Khátun. These posts have long been recognized as belonging to Herát. Yet, in a time of profound peace, whilst the British Commissioner appointed to mark out the boundary was waiting for his Russian colleague, Russian troops crossed the line then recognized as the boundary and seized a post, thirty-two miles to the south of it! Not content even with that they proceeded likewise to occupy the pass of Zulfagar, some twenty-eight miles still nearer to Herát!

There was no excuse for these acts: Pul-i-Khátun is merely a good place for a new departure; it is not even a village; it never belonged to, and has nothing in common with, the Turkomans, whether Sarik or other; it is simply an open ground covered to the east by high mountains. Of the ground immediately to the west of it Sir Charles MacGregor, who made the journey from Meshed to Sarakhs in 1875, gives the following account. I should premise that the road follows the Keshef-i Rud as far as Shor-jah, just beyond Ak-i-Durbend, and branches at a right angle northwards, just before reaching Pul-i-Khátun:†—"On

* Literally "The Lady's Bridge."

† To the number of the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, for September, 1881, is attached an excellent map of this part of the country, of Northern Khorasán and the Kara-Kúm Desert, compiled from Colonel C. E. Stewart's survey of that country, from maps by Major the Hon. G. E. Napier, from the Surveyor-General of India's maps, and from the Russian Typographical Department of 1881. It is noteworthy that, in all these maps, the Afghan frontier extends from Sarakhs, by way of Imam-Bakhsh and Robat-Abdullah Khán, in a straight line to a point above Andkhai.

Saturday the 24th of July, we marched 16 miles to Ak Durbend. The road leads down the valley almost the whole way, only occasionally leaving it to go over spurs to the left, which here and there impinge on the river. It is quite practicable everywhere for field artillery. At the eighth mile we passed a newly built fort called Bughbughoo, occupied by thirty wretched creatures, who looked at us passing with the longing of prisoners afforded a glimpse of the outer world.

“At the fourteenth mile we descended to the bed of the river and crossed to the right bank by a very nasty, because very muddy, ford. Thence the road went over an open plain for one mile, when it ascended over a spur by a steep, but otherwise easy pass, to another little opening, which was again divided from Ak Durbend by another similar pass.

“The river here is confined between hills, so that the valley is not more than 300 yards across, and beyond this it gradually gets narrower and narrower, till it becomes a regular defile, and continues thus till it emerges from the hills at Pul-i-Khátun where the ground becomes much more open. All access from the east is closed by towers placed on commanding positions overhanging the defile, so that the position of Ak Durbend becomes one of very considerable importance in considering the defence of this border, as by it is the only practical road between Múzduran and the southern side of the ridges which bound the Ab-i-Meshed on the south.”

Four miles beyond Ak Durbend is Shorjah, where, as stated, the road branches northwards to Sarakhs. Pul-i-Khátun is about eight miles to the east by south from Shorjah. In his book (*Journey through Khorásán in 1875*) MacGregor gives sketches of Ak Durbend and of the gorge of the Ab-i-Meshed above Pul-i-Khátun.

On the subject of the sudden sweep of Russia upon that post, Professor Vambéry thus writes (March 1885)* :—
“To this fact I reckon,” that is, to the fact that Russia has a settled design to annex Herát, “before all, that lawless and unjust aggression of Russia on the north-eastern frontiers of Persia, an appropriation of a large tract of country to the occupation of which the Government of the Sháh has not given its consent, and the annexation of which has been only made with the obvious purpose to approach the district of Herát and to swoop down upon this important place in order to seize the Key of India, and so become the undisputable master of the country lying between the Paropamisus and the Oxus. I fully admit, as I stated in my previous paper on the Russo-Afghán Boundary Commission, that the country extending between the middle course of the Heri-rúd and the Murgháb, respectively, the Kushk (*rectius* Khushk = dry) river has formed, in the course of the present century, a debatable ground between Afghánistán and Persia, but since the last-named country was unable to clear this highway of the Turkoman Alamans (forays) on their inroads into the eastern part of Khorásán and Sëistan, the *de facto* possession must be, and can be, only accorded to the Afgháns, as to the Power able to put a check on the devastating incursions of the reckless freebooters of the north. If Russia had the sincere intention not to meddle with Herát, as her statesmen assert, the encroachment upon Sarakhs, whether the new or the old one, which is almost the same, would have been quite superfluous, and she could have easily avoided to rouse the just suspicion of England. But we see that quite the contrary has happened. Encouraged by the vague threats coming from the unofficial quarters of London and Cal-

* *Army and Navy Magazine*, April, 1885.

cutta, Russia hurriedly fell down still further to the south, and laid hand upon Pul-i-Khatún (the Lady's Bridge), at the very moment when the English Boundary Commission, headed by Sir Peter Lumsden, arrived at the spot. The object in view was to prove to the English that the place where the Keshef-rúd joins the Heri-rúd is Russian territory, and cannot be made the object of further discussion. But we beg leave to ask what are the reasons which have necessitated this step? There are no Turkomans subject to Russia in this outlying district, there is no interest to defend, and the whole movement is nothing else but a badly-concealed attempt against Herát."

The Zulfagar Pass is even stronger for aggressive purposes: I shall speak at greater length of this further on.

Writing on the subject from Bála Murgháb, forty-six miles below Panjdeh, the correspondent of the *Times* (March 12, 1885) writes as follows:—"You will see from the map that both the roads to Herát run through Badghis," the districts to the north and north-west of the city of Herát, "which comprises the valleys of the Heri-rúd, Kushk, and Murgháb. That is why it is so valuable to us and to Russia. If Russia had no designs on Herát she would not care whether her frontier were at Sarakhs or Pul-i-Khatún, or at Yolatan or Panjdeh. But of course she cares. Russia has statesmen, and each naturally aspires to be the Joshua who will terminate these weary wanderings and lead her armies into the Promised Land. Once there, their troubles are at an end. Everything is there to be found, for the valley of Herát flows with milk and honey." The writer closes a very interesting letter with the following pregnant sentence:—"The two thousand miles we have marched between the Caspian and the Indus have certainly convinced us that India is the garden of Asia, and that only in India—Herát and Badghis are but oases—are water and

shade the rule and not the exception. Now we can understand why there have been so many invasions of Hindustan."

On the same point a well-informed writer in the same paper thus recently expressed himself :—

"At the time of the Russian war with Khiva, Sher Ali represented to the Viceroy his apprehension of the consequences that would ensue if the Turkomans of Merv were driven by Russian invasion into his province of Badghis. The fact that no European traveller passed through this region after Vambéry in the early days of Sher Ali's authority to tell us what the exact condition of Panjdeh was, is not an argument invalidating the Afghán claims over the place, especially as those claims are supported by the receipts of tribute from the surrounding tribes contained in the registers of the Herát Administration. If the presence of the Amír's troops and officials were to be made the only test of his right to rule there are many other places besides those which Russia has seized that Abdurrahman would have to surrender. It is, of course, intelligible that Russia should seek to make the Amír's burden in governing his state as heavy as possible, but it is difficult to understand how this argument can be indorsed by any impartial witness. The Amír holds Panjdeh, partly because it has always been dependent on Herát, and partly because he found it marked on the map well within the frontier drawn by the English Intelligence Department. But his chief reason of all is that the possession of Panjdeh is necessary to the preservation of his hold on the road running northwards from Herát through the province of Afghán Turkistan to Maimené and Balkh. Russia would give him that road and no more. It is absolutely essential to its security that the Ameer should retain the control of the region on its western flank, which includes Panjdeh and the Kushk valley. On the question

of Panjdeh, as on that of Zulfagar and the Robat Pass, there is no room for discussion or difference of opinion. Those places form an integral part of the Amír's dominions, and apart from their own inherent value they are most important as constituting the natural out-works of Herát. The Russian troops have not yet assailed either Panjdeh or Khombou, but they are encamped close to the former place and at Zulfagar. We have frequently pointed out the risk thus created of a hostile collision, and we can only repeat, that an attack on either of these places could only be regarded as an act of unprovoked aggression upon the Amír which we should be bound to promptly resent by force of arms.

“Those persons who extenuate the latest phase of Russian aggression ignore all the circumstances which induced the English Government to join with Russia in an attempt to delimit the Afghán frontier. They purposely overlook the fact that the delimitation of the Amír's boundary on the north-west was taken up because Russia, only twelve months ago, seized Merv in supreme indifference to her repeated declarations to us that she had not the least intention of appropriating the Tekke stronghold. We have no wish to embitter the present controversy by dwelling upon past breaches of faith, but the sudden and secret occupation of Merv was an act that showed how illusory Russian pledges are. Yet now that Russia, far from standing still, has within the last year pushed her out-posts 150 miles south of Merv, and to places within Afghánistán, we are again asked to confide to her honour when she repudiates all intention of treating Herát as she has treated the other places on the Murgháb and Herirud. When Russian troops entered Merv it was at once pointed out in these columns that the time had come for a definite and decisive policy with regard to the Russian

advance towards India. We only acquiesced in the seizure of Merv on the express understanding that the frontier of Afghánistán should be clearly marked out, and that the least infraction of this line would be regarded by England as a *casus belli*. That course was adopted by our Government, and to all appearance that of the Czar also coincided in its justice and agreed to participate in giving it validity. To the policy of maintaining the integrity of Afghánistán this country was committed, not only by a sense of its own interests, but also by the definite assurances given to the Amír from time to time, and particularly in 1883. It is one from which the Government have as yet shown no sign of departing, and, indeed, the least symptom of wavering would be attended with fatal results to their own existence. They have from every point of view a position which is practically unassailable, so far as the matter is one of negotiation. The exchange of opinions which took place in 1872-3 between the two Governments on the subject of the Afghán frontier has been described as no longer binding on Russia; but the Russian Ambassador at the Court of St. James's was instructed in the spring of 1882 to state that the St. Petersburg Foreign Office still recognized the validity of the arrangement then concluded. This statement acquired more explicit value from being followed up by the declaration of Russia's readiness to delimit the Afghán frontier from the Oxus to Sarakhs. How, it may be asked, can Russia carry out her own proposition by throwing a loose line round the Salar and Sarik districts, and incorporating all the region up to the Paropamisus? The Russian acts now are in flat contradiction of everything stated by M. de Giers up to the period of the Merv occupation, and there is every reason to say that those expressions were repeated still more emphatically after that event had taken place.

“While the English Government are tied down to a policy of maintaining the integrity of Afghánistán by their formal representations to Russia and by their solemn pledges to the Ameer, the Russian Government equally bound themselves to co-operate in the task of delimiting ‘the Afghan frontier from Khojah Saleh to Sarakhs.’ In measuring the extent of the unfriendly action to which Russia has resorted within the last two or three months it is necessary to remember that the Frontier Commission was devised as a means of showing Russia’s good faith, and of proving that the Czar’s conquest of Merv did not constitute a menace to England, as many persons represented that it would. Nor can we lose sight of the fact that long before General Lumsden left London the scope of his labours had been defined by the highest Russian as well as English authorities. He was to complete what had been left unfinished in 1873, and to give the Ameer’s territory, which was admitted to be ‘outside the sphere of Russia’s influence,’ a recognized boundary from the Oxus to Sarakhs. It is as impossible to reconcile Russia’s recent action with the original understanding regarding the labours of this Commission, as it is to discover in the occupation of Zulfagar and Pul-i-Khisti the evidence that the Russian Government has no sinister designs upon Herát and other places nearer India. Instead of cordially co-operating with us, as originally arranged, the Russian Government have delayed their Commission until their troops had occupied the most important positions within the debatable ground, and then they have brought forward the ethnographical principle, which should have been ventilated at a much earlier stage of the question if it was to be employed at all. Although they went so far as to nominate a chief Commissioner in the person of General Zelenoy last September, they have allowed him to remain ever since on his

private estate near Tiflis ; and when the season approached for beginning work on the spot, instead of hastening the movements of their representatives they sent an agent, M. Lessar, to London to make demands which are simply preposterous and to which no Government could venture to yield. In short, they have striven throughout to hoodwink our Ministers and to mislead English opinion ; but they have already imposed more than enough on our credulity. Not only have they committed a flagrant breach of diplomatic etiquette, but they have really invaded Afghánistán. Unless they retire from the positions, which they should never have entered, there is little chance of averting a hostile collision, for the English Government can never concur in the violent seizure of districts to which Russia has not the shadow of a claim, and some of which are vitally necessary to the preservation of the Amír's authority in his kingdom."

Deferring to another chapter the consideration of the several routes from the important centre of Herát to the places on its frontier—for the districts in dispute must be regarded as outlying districts of the Herát province—I propose to treat now of those districts only, to seize which, Russia, in a time of profound tranquillity, and at the moment she had herself selected for amicable delineation, has violated the rights of nations and threatened the peace of the world.

The outlying districts comprise the territory comprehended between the line already marked from Sarakhs to Khoja Saleh, and an imaginary line below it, stretching from a point below the Zulfagar pass, sixty miles below Sarakhs, on the one side, between Panjdeh and Meruchak on the Murgháb, to a point just above Andkhai, and thence by the existing line to Khoja Saleh. This line would bring Russia within easy striking distance of Herát !

If the reader will consult Colonel Stewart's map he will see that the first line, from Sarakhs to Khoja Saleh, cuts off the edge of the Kara-Kúm desert some distance above Gul-Bulu and a small portion of the same desert in the vicinity of Sarakhs. With these exceptions the district consists of valley, plain, and mountain, capable of being developed into an extraordinary state of fertility. To the west, from Sarakhs down to Kuhsan, up the Heri-rúd or Tejend, the country has never been occupied by the Turkomans, but that migratory tribes of that race have settled for a time in other parts has been a consequence of the generally disturbed state of the country. Turkomans were encamped for instance, at Panjdeh, when Captain Abbott visited that place in 1840. But the Turkomans who have occupied parts of those districts have been ever ready to submit to the prince ruling at Herát whenever he might show any disposition to enforce his power. They submitted to Sher Ali, and, as the reader will see from a letter quoted in the next chapter, no one has made a greater impression on the several tribes within his territories than the present Afghán ruler. If, then, the Russians should base their claims to the positions they demand on the Heri-rúd (Tejend) and the Murgháb, and the country above the imaginary line I have referred to, on the ground that, having occupied Sarakhs and conquered Merv they are the inheritors of the territories occupied by the Sarik Turkomans, those claims fall at once to the ground, for, whilst the positions on the Heri-rúd (Tejend) never were occupied by the Turkomans; whilst at the several points below Sarakhs villages were not built because of the dread of the Turkomans felt by the people; the tribes of that race who pitched their tents in the valley of the Murgháb, at Robat-Abdullah Khán, and below it, have, since 1863, and even

previously, paid tribute to the representative of the Amír who was ruling at Herát !

But Russia wants that broad strip of land, first, because, situate for the most part below the desert, it partakes the general fertility of the Herát province, and may therefore be occupied as a base for operations against the valleys of Kushkh and Kala-i-nau. What those valleys are, what the country knows under the generic term "Hérat" is, will be explained in the next chapter. Russia wants that strip, secondly, because the possession of it will bring her within easy striking distance of the city of Herát ; she wants it, thirdly, because, by taking it, she will absolutely neutralize Persia, by thrusting a wedge between the Persian town, Meshed, and her frontier.

Now, if we allow Russia to occupy these districts, or any portion of them, we virtually make her a present of Herát ; and I raise again my warning voice to declare, that if Russia once be allowed to occupy Herát, the conquest of India by her will be a mere question of time. Even at Sarakhs, she was within 202 miles of the city of that name, whilst the English outposts are 514 miles distant from it, and 145 miles even from Kandahar. Since, then, she has illegally, against the law of nations, pushed her troops across the line, which, since 1872-3, has been recognized as the frontier line of western Afghánistán, and has occupied the pass of Zulfagar on the Heri-rúd, and the posts of Nikalshemi, Ak Robat, and Pul-i-Khisti, it is the duty of the Government of England to insist that she withdraw without delay. The insistence might be made now with effect, for the Transcaspian line of railway is not yet ready, and Russia is not, therefore, prepared for a mortal struggle.

Of the Russian claim to Panjdeh, a foreigner well competent to judge, Professor Vambéry, of the University of Buda-Pesth, writes as follows. Continuing the remarks

which I have already extracted, about Pul-i-Khátun, he adds :

“Of a similar nature is the aggression planned, but hitherto frustrated, against Panjdeh (five villages), on the right bank of the Murgháb, there where the dreary sands of the Kara-Kum steppe ends and the cultivable country of the outskirts of the Paropamisus begins. In former times Panjdeh was a most flourishing place in the district of Herát, and under the reign of Sultan Husein Mirza Baikara, when the capital on the Heri-rúd was the cultural centre of the Eastern Mohammedan world, the environs of Panjdeh and Maruchak (Little Merv) were the favourite summer abode of the rich and luxurious world of Herát. In the subsequent periods we only occasionally meet with the name of Panjdeh in the historical works referring to this part of Khorasán, but we can safely assume that the ultimate destruction and desolation of the place dates only from the time when the Sarik Turkomans, vanquished by the Tekke Turkomans, had to retire towards the mountains, particularly to the region of Upper Murgháb, which was reckoned from immemorial times as belonging to Herát, and, since this place was taken by the Afgháns, as an integral part of Afghánistán.

“The Russian claim on this place is, therefore, from every point of view, unfounded and unjust. By their assertion that the Sariks have voluntarily acknowledged the supremacy of the Czar, they might claim the country on both banks of the Murgháb from Yolatan (*rectius* Yul-o-tin=passage) to Sari Yar and Ak Tepé, but not the country near and around Panjdeh, the Afghán property of which had been ascertained by the Russian traveller, Dr. Regel, in July 1884, who found there an Afghán garrison of a very unfriendly behaviour, in consequence of which he was obliged to change his route and to return, *viâ* Merv, to the Oxus.

Panjdeh, which the Russian traveller erroneously calls *Pandi*, is, therefore, in the unquestionable possession of Afghánistán, and the recent attempt of General Alikhanoff to overrun this place and lay hold on it in the name of the Emperor of Russia cannot be otherwise styled than an irruption into a foreign country, nay, into the dominions of a prince subsidized by England, consequently into the territory of a friend and ally of Great Britain.”*

Subsequently, the 15th March, the same high authority wrote a letter to the *Times* (21st March), which virtually disposes of the assertion made by Russian partisans that Panjdeh had never previously been occupied by the Afghans, and was only recently taken possession of on the instigation of Sir Peter Lumsden. The letter runs as follows :—

“In your article entitled ‘The question at issue between England and Russia,’ published in the *Times* of the 13th instant, I read that the assertion of several leading German papers concerning the quite recent Afghán occupation of Panjdeh can be easily refuted by the fact that Abdurrahman had already ordered his troops to take possession of Panjdeh twelve months ago. In order to prove this fact your contributor proceeds to quote the events of 1883, when the ruler of Kábul got an English map showing the frontiers of his country towards the north-west, and it was in consequence of this cartographic communication that he found it practicable to put a garrison in the above-mentioned place on the Murgháb.

“As Continental critics may be rather sceptical as to English maps and English official communications, I beg leave to call your attention to a German scientific paper written by a Russian officer, in which it is clearly stated

* *Army and Navy Magazine*, April, 1885.

that Panjdeh was already in the possession of the Afgháns in June, 1884, and that it was not at all the instigation of the English, under Sir Peter Lumsden, which prompted the Afgháns to occupy Panjdeh and to provoke the quarrel between England and Russia in Central Asia, as Russian, German, and also French papers choose to imagine and to represent.

“The paper named is nothing else than the highly respectable geographical periodical known as ‘Dr. A. Petermann’s Mittheilungen,’ volume 31, 1885, No. I., in which there is a notice by Dr. Regel, the explorer of Darwaz, Roshau, &c., concerning his journey from Tchihardjui across Merv to Pandi (Panjdeh) and back, executed in June, 1884, and where we read, p. 24—‘Als wir am vierten Tage (*i.e.*, the 9th of June, 1884) auf Pändi (Pandjeh) losgehen wollten, brachten die Leute aus Yulitan (Yolöten) die Nachricht erstere Ortschaft (*viz.*, Panjdeh) sei eben erst von 4,000 bis 5,000 Afghánen besetzt worden.’* There are other similar statements concerning the presence of the Afgháns in Panjdeh in the month of June, 1884, and as this German-Russian officer will not be suspected of prevalent English sympathies, and as he had written his paper long before the outbreak of the present quarrel, I venture to say the question of English instigation may be easily dismissed, as the testimony of the traveller named will suffice to refute any contrary statement.”

It is clear, then, that against right, in the face of right, in defiance of her repeated protestations, Russia has crossed the border line which she agreed to in 1872-3, which is

* “When on the fourth day (June 9, 1884) we were about to proceed to Pandi (Panjdeh), the people from Yulitan (Yolöten) brought us the news that that place (*viz.* Panjdeh) had been but just occupied by from four to five thousand Afghans.”

recognized as the border line in all the Russian maps of any authority. She has committed this infraction of public law at the very time she had herself selected for a new and peaceful demarcation of the frontier line, when she knew that a large English army and a contingent of Indian troops were in the Soudan, that the minds of the English ministers were occupied by grave European complications, and that England was less prepared for a great war than she had been for thirty years. She committed this infraction of public law, moreover, at a period when the counsels of England were guided by a ministry whom she had often deceived, and had found no difficulty in deceiving again : a ministry which she had seen yielding to bold deeds in the Transvaal, to pressure from France, to something very like menace from Germany : a ministry which had shown a strong inclination to undergo any humiliation rather than engage the country in war, even in rightful war. Feeling, then, as she had a right to feel, that the game of bluster and swagger was a safe game to play under the circumstances, she had played it boldly and unscrupulously. Pursuing the policy so aptly described by Lord Palmerston in his letter to Lord Clarendon, quoted in a previous page, she spoke in honied phrases at St. Petersburg, whilst, ready to disavow them if they should fail or to reward them if they should succeed, she instructed her agents on the frontier to strike the blow which might secure for her a new and very real base against India.

How have the Ministers of England replied to this audacious attempt? We all know how Mr. Pitt would have answered it, how Mr. Canning would have answered it, how Lord Palmerston would have answered it. We know how America, how Germany, how even France, would have met such an insult. Within four-and-twenty hours orders would have been transmitted from St. Peters-

burg to the frontier for the withdrawal of the Russian troops across the border. If the outrage had been met with firmness and resolution, prompt atonement would have been made. But, up to the present moment, our Ministers have displayed neither firmness nor resolution. Far from grasping the real significance of Russia's forward move, they have begun by making a concession which is a virtual yielding of Russia's demands. Russia had no case where-with to support her impudent advance. Our Ministers have provided her with one. Let us imagine, if we can, a French army crossing the German frontier, which was finally settled about the same time as the Afghán frontier, and seizing Metz ! Is it possible to imagine the German Chancellor allowing the invading army to remain in that fortress until it should be decided by negotiation to whom the line of the Rhine properly belonged : then to listen to Prince Bismark, when interrogated in Parliament, as he made a statement like the following ?

“ Upon that communication ”—a demand by Prince Bismark for the withdrawal of the French troops—“ a correspondence ensued, and the French declined to withdraw their troops. They gave certain explanations about them ; and they founded their answer upon the belief they entertained that the territory is theirs, that they claim it as a matter of right. Well, sir, that being the state of the case—we of course had addressed a requisition to them in the belief that it was German territory—as the French made a serious claim to be the rightful possessors of the territory, we could do nothing in the matter consistently, I think, either with prudence or with any honourable regard to the interests of peace, except to prosecute measures for bringing about a proper investigation and decision of the claim that had been preferred. That being so, undoubtedly, I will not say actually, there has been a withdrawal of the

requisition, but substantially it comes to the same thing. The application that was made has lapsed from the circumstances of the case."

And yet, *mutatis nominibus*, this was the precise explanation, these were the *ipsissima verba*, which the Prime Minister of England made when interrogated by Mr. Edward Stanhope as to the action he had taken with respect to the invasion of a frontier, which is, to all intents and purposes, the frontier of British India !

It is to a certain extent a satisfactory sign of the times that this reply of Mr. Gladstone has awakened the scorn and contempt of the men of all parties. The *Times* of the following morning expressed the general opinion when it lamented that the Prime Minister should have shown "so little of the spirit of a man who means to vindicate the rights of this country." . . . "To avoid war by simple abandonment of claims which have not been investigated by competent authority, and to permit Russia to retain positions which she has seized in defiance of her own admission of their doubtful ownership, is to proclaim ourselves impotent in presence of audacious aggression, and to deprive ourselves of the confidence which alone can lead to firm and fruitful alliance with Afghánistán."

It is in vain, I fear, notwithstanding this expression, and similar expressions, of opinion from all parts of the country, to hope that the Ministry will be inspired with the moral courage which can nip an evil in the bud. Too often have they turned their cheeks to the smiter. I would, however, ask them to remember that in this instance it is not a question of minor importance—it is an Empire which is at stake !

The rulers of England are the trustees for the people of England. I beseech, I implore them, not to neglect this opportunity of shutting the door to the invader. Let them "be just and fear not." If mistakes have been made by

both parties in the past, let both unite in the sacred duty of firmly securing the noblest dependency of England. For it is that dependency, it is India, which is endangered by this advance. If my feeble voice cannot penetrate within the portals of Downing Street, if they refuse to hear me, let them listen to the voice of one to whom for many years they entrusted the Government of India, and to whose advice they are bound to pay attention. "My own view," wrote the Duke of Argyll, in a letter dated the 18th March of the current year, to the *St. James's Gazette*:—"My own view has always been that the conquest by Russia of the Tekke Turkomans and of all the khanates of Central Asia has been inevitable. I have held, further, that no civilization and no commerce could be established in those regions until that conquest had been accomplished; and that on this ground, as well as on several other grounds, it was at once useless and undignified on our part to be perpetually remonstrating against 'advances' which we could not prevent and which, in the interests of humanity, we ought not to regret.

"But none of these considerations apply to any advances by Russia across the borders of Afghánistán. We must insist on the independence and integrity of that country being respected; and in so far as the Afghán kingdom must of necessity be under any predominant influence, we must insist that this predominance shall be ours. I trust all parties are agreed in this doctrine and in this policy, and in desiring that our Government shall carry it into effect with firmness."

Finally, I would invite their attention to the remarks, published in the *Times* of the same date, 19th March, written by the great soldier whose warnings regarding the occurrence of certain events in Central Asia unless we should take certain precautions, have, unfortunately, always

been neglected and always justified. "A very real danger has come," wrote Sir Edward Hamley, "without our seeking, to meet us on the Afghán frontier. It is impossible to conceal from ourselves the design with which Russia is pushing on. Our manner of meeting her is among the marvels of the most unaccountable period of our history. We treat her as one of two established coterminous Powers whose respective limits require definition. The facts are dropped out of sight that a few years ago she was a thousand miles from the Afghán frontier, that she grounds her brand new title to contest its territory with us on her conquest of certain predatory tribes on whose outskirts other predatory tribes wander, and that on the strength of this extraordinary claim she suddenly puts forth the impudent formula, 'Whatever territory you cannot satisfactorily prove your right to is mine,' which thenceforth becomes the basis of negotiation. What can such a pretension put in action mean but to defy us to war, with the alternative of ruinous submission? And, in fact, for weeks past, the daily question has been, 'Is there to be war with Russia?' an event only staved off thus far by the humiliating alternative. Like the terrified prey of brigands we have cast ourselves *ventre à terre*. But even submission the most abject cannot avail. The attitude we have chosen is not exactly the best for keeping the throat from the knife. And what effect will it have on our would-be allies, the Afgháns, the poverty of whose dialect does not perhaps enable them to discriminate nicely between an agreement and an arrangement! What effect, too, in India? If I do not speak of the effect in this country it is because we are, for the time, wrapt in an opium dream, in which facts count for nothing, delusions for much.

"By common consent, the reason for the Russian

advance is to be found in our embarrassments in Egypt. That being the case, what could Russia desire better if she herself had the ordering of our policy, than that we should cast fresh armies and new heaps of treasure into the Soudan? Can she be supposed to look on with other feelings than delight while British ships are landing railway plant by the hundred mile at Suakim? Had the same energy been displayed on the Indus we should now have had a railway to Quetta, perhaps to Kándahár, with ten thousand British troops at the end of it.

“What a sound judgment would seem to counsel, then, is an immediate reconsideration of our position. Nobody will maintain that we can carry on two wars, either of which would sufficiently tax our resources. We must choose between the will-o'-the-wisp and the mortal emergency. Happily, troops and material at Souakim are already so far on the direct way to Kurrachee. And for the force on the Nile, if it can continue its retreat to Lower Egypt (and the doubt speaks much for the perverse ingenuity which created it), let it abandon its delightful and salubrious summer quarters and descend the river; thus, so many men will be saved towards the saving of the Empire. And let us simultaneously take all needful steps for placing an effective army in the field and putting this kingdom in a condition of defence. If, at the same time, that lost art, diplomacy, should chance to revive among us, it will find ample occupation in endeavouring to persuade the Afgháns to invite us to a military occupation of their country, in procuring friends among the European Powers, and in persuading the unspeakable Turk to form with us that agreement (or arrangement) necessary to enable us to operate effectively in the Black Sea.”

These are pregnant words. Of this, at least, Englishmen

may be sure, that it is only by concentrating all the energies of Great Britain on the maintenance of the existing frontier of Afghánistán that Herát can be saved. If we allow Herát to fall, India is doomed. That the reader may understand this clearly I proceed to answer the query which I can imagine forming in his mind, "What are those places which thus seem to constitute the outlying redoubt of India?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OUTLYING REDOUBT OF INDIA.

THE city of Herát stands in the fertile valley of the Heri-rúd 2,650 feet above the level of the sea. The Heri-rúd rises in the mountains of Hazáreh, not far from the village of Robat Tarwan. Under the name of Jangal-áb it flows in a south-westerly direction to a point below Daolatzár, a village on the direct road between Herát and Bamian. At this point it is joined by another branch, the Sir Tingiláb, which rises likewise in the Hazáreh range, though at a point somewhat more to the south-east than the Jangal-áb. From the point of junction the united streams take the name of Heri-rúd and follow an almost direct westerly course south of the Paropamisan range. Some fifty miles beyond Herát, which lies near its northern bank, the Heri-rud takes a turn to the north-west and then to the north receiving many streams in its course and passes Rozanak, Kuhsan, Kasan, Pul-i-Khátun and Sarakhs. Between the two last named places it loses the name of Heri-rud and takes that of Tejend. Under this name it flows north-westward till it is lost in the sand and swamps of the great Turkoman desert.

At the point already indicated where the combined waters of the Sir Tingiláb and the Jangal-áb form the Heri-rúd, the river traverses a broad valley which it adorns and fertilises. All along this channels from the river spread over its broad surface, converting deserts into corn-fields, and waste lands into gardens of fruit. The supply

from its swiftly running waters never fails. It was equal to the demand even in the days when Herát was the most famous city of Central Asia, possessing the most influential court and constituting the most splendid commercial mart in the Eastern world. Though the channels have been in many instances destroyed the supply is more than equal to the demand even now.

In this valley the city of Herát is the principal city. According to the graphic account of Conolly, who visited it in 1830, it is situated "at four miles distant from hills on the north, and twelve miles from those which run south of it. The space between the hills is one beautiful extent of little fortified villages, gardens, vineyards and cornfields, and this rich scene is brightened by many small streams of shining water, which cut the plain in all directions. A dam is thrown across the Heri-rúd, and its waters, being turned into many canals, are so conducted over the vale of Herát that every part of it is watered. Varieties of the most delicious fruit are grown in the valley, and they are sold cheaper even than at Meshed; the necessities of life are plentiful and cheap, and the bread and water of Herát are proverbial for their excellence. I really never, in England even, tasted more delicious water than that of the Heri-rúd: it is 'as clear as tears,' and the natives say, only equalled by the waters of Kashmir, which make those who drink them beautiful."

The origin of the city can be traced far into antiquity.

To the ancients the province of which it was and is the capital was known as Aria and Ariana. The city is mentioned by the earliest writers. Arrian writes of it as Artakoana or Artakana, the royal city of the inhabitants of Aria. It often served as the residence of the greatest conquerors of the East. Tradition brings to it Nebuchadnezzar and Semiramis. The Persian historians assert, with

remarkable unanimity that Alexander the Great gave it the name under which Arrian writes of it. There can be no doubt but that the city was the gate through which the son of Philip of Macedon passed to the conquest of India.

It was towards the close of the tenth century that the valley of the Heri-rúd obtained the importance which it exercised during many centuries which followed. An oasis between the Turkoman deserts and the rocks and mountains of Afghánistán, the centre where converged the roads from Bokhára, from Persia, and from India, it became, at that period a commercial centre which even the contests between the Iránian and the Turanian did not disturb. In the year 1219 the city of Herát possessed 12,000 retail shops ; 6,000 public baths, caravansaries, and water-mills ; 350 schools and monastic institutions ; 144,000 occupied houses ; and the city was visited yearly by caravans from all parts of Asia.

The invasions of Chengiz Khan, 1219-22, and of Taimúr in 1381, inflicted upon Herát enormous damage. It was through her gates that the latter marched to the conquest of India. But the rebound was magical. Under the rule of Sháh Rokh, fourth son of Taimur, Herát soon vindicated her claim to the title of Queen of the cities of the East. The country beyond the Oxus boasted of many famous cities. There was Bokhára, and there was a city then more influential still, the famous Samarkhand. But Sháh-Rokh recognized in the province of Herát a military position whence he could hold fast the countries beyond the Oxus, whilst keeping in a firm grip the countries to the east, to the west, and to the south. Under his rule Herát became the capital of the whole of Central Asia.

The renewed prosperity of the city and province, beginning with the rule of the son of Taimur, 1396-7, lasted with but little interruption, to the period of its con-

quest by Persia in 1510. With that conquest the glory of the city departed. The monarchs of Persia neglected Herát to patronize a city of their own, the holy city of Meshed.

From the date of its capture by Persia, the province of Herát became the battle field between the Uzbeks and the Iránians. The city suffered many sieges. Finally it fell to the latter, and thence to the year 1715 it shared the fortunes of the Persian monarchy, neglected and all but forsaken, from that moment, until the death of Nádir Sháh.

It fell then into the hands of the Afgháns, and in their hands it has since remained.

The limits of the province of Herát have varied with the times. But regarding that province as constituting western Afghánistán it may be said to be bordered on the north by the line from Sarakhs to Khoja Saleh, on the west by the Heri-rúd, to the south-west by the Persian desert as far as Sëistan, to the south by the Heri-rúd; to the east by the mountainous ranges separating it from Andkhoi, Maimené and Shibbergan.

It's value to India rests on two facts:—the one patent to the eye, that as long as the province of Herát is held by an ally or dependant of the ruler of India, India is unassailable: the other that Herát constitutes a new and perfect base for a hostile army.

On the first point I would remark that Herát is called the gate of India because through it, and through it alone, can the valleys be entered which lead to the most valuable of all the divisions of Asia. Those valleys, running nearly north and south, are protected to the east by ranges practically inaccessible, to the west by sterile deserts. No invading army would attempt to traverse the great salt desert, and the desert immediately to the south of it, the Dasht-i-Naobad, whilst a British army should hold Herát. In the eloquent

lecture, already alluded to, on the subject of the frontier of India, delivered by Sir E. Hamley in 1878, that master of the strategic art laid down the broad principle that if England were to hold the western line of communication with India, that by Herat and Kandahar, she need not trouble herself very much about the eastern or Kábul line. On the same occasion, the eminent soldier-politician who has made the question of the frontier policy of India the study of his life, declared, in reply to a question put to him, that rather than allow the occupation of Herát by Russia, he would venture the whole might of British India. Sir Henry Rawlinson saw clearly that the possession of Herát by Russia meant the possession not only of a strategic base whence Russia could invade India, but the possession of a country where she could remain quiescent until the opportune moment for making the fatal spring should arrive.

The mention of this consideration leads me to the second point of my argument—to the assertion that the province of Herát would form a secure and perfect base for an army of invasion. I have spoken of the wonderful fertility of the valley of the Heri-rúd. Ancient remains prove that the valley of the Murgháb has been and can be rendered again not less productive. The valleys of Khúshk and Kala-i-Nau, the country about Panjdeh, belong to the same category. Abbott, Conolly, Vambéry, found everywhere traces of large occupation. The province produces in abundance the willow and the poplar, trees which make the best charcoal. It possesses mines of lead, of iron, and of sulphur. The surface of many parts of the country is laden with saltpetre. Its fields produce in abundance corn and wine and oil. Place an army in the province which, called by its inhabitants Badghis, may be comprehended under the generic term Herát, and nothing

need be brought to it from Europe. The valley which was the granary and the province which was the garden of Central Asia, can equip it, provide it with its *matériel*, ay, even with men and horses. On the city which gives its name to the valley, moreover, converge all the great roads, but one, leading on India. Occupied by Russia, it would become "an eye to see and an arm to strike."

These are not my words alone, they are not my thoughts alone. They are the words and the thoughts of every Englishman of ordinary intelligence who has studied the subject. They were the words and thoughts of the ever-to-be-lamented Bartle Frere : they are the words and thoughts of Hamley, of Rawlinson, of Napier of Magdala, of Roberts, of MacGregor. What says the latter, a most accomplished and instructed officer, on the subject? I cannot quote from the able memorandum which I received in confidence, but, fortunately, there is an appendix to his book on Khorásán which contains his views, written so far back as 1875, on the subject I am now discussing.

"It is not, however, sufficient," wrote Colonel MacGregor, "to show the importance of Merv. I will go further, and try and show why Herát is important, because of course if Herát were not important, and there was nothing beyond Merv but desert down to the sea, I need not have troubled myself to pen these remarks. Merv has almost no more value, apart from Herát, than the head of a sap has apart from a fortress selected for attack. I therefore wish particular attention to be given to the next step by which I hope to prove my case.

"Herát has been termed the Key of India, not lightly as a mere figure of speech, but by every officer who has had an opportunity of seeing its valley. It is so, because it is the nearest and best point at which an invader could con-

centrate and prepare for the invasion of that country ; advantages which it gains from its beautiful valley, the fertility of which is unrivalled in Asia ; from its strategical position, which gives it the command of all the important roads to India ; from the great strength of its fortress, it being, in fact, the strongest place from the Caspian to the Indus ; from its admirable climate, and from the prestige it enjoys throughout Asia.

“The fertility of its valley, and its capability of maintaining large forces, is proved by the fact that it has been besieged oftener than any city in Asia, and has always afforded supplies for the armies of both besiegers and besieged. And it must be remembered the first have sometimes reached as many as 80,000 men, and have seldom fallen below 30,000, while both have always been composed of undisciplined men who destroyed nearly as much as they consumed. Moreover, I have seen it with my own eyes, and I have no hesitation in saying that it is capable of maintaining a very large army.

“It will not be necessary to describe the defences of Herát, but only to remark that Sir H. Rawlinson’s description is in no way exaggerated when he says, ‘It is surrounded by works of the most colossal character, which, with the adaptations and improvements of modern science, might be rendered almost impregnable.’

“A glance at the map will convince any soldier of its importance strategically. No less than five distinct routes lead to Herát from the west, viz : 1. from Ashruff by Shahrood, Toorshez, Khaf ; 2. from Guz by Bostam, Subzwar, Toorbut, Haiduree, and Shuhr-i-Now ; 3. from Astrabad by Findurisk, Jahjurm, Jowen, Nishapoor, Furreeman, Shuhr-i-Now ; 4. by the Goorgaun, Rabat Ishk, Boojnoord, Koochaun, to Mushudd, and Jam ; 5. from the mouth of the Attruk, by that river through the

same points. From the north two routes lead direct on to it from Merv, and a third arrives from Kirki by Maimené. Herát commands all these routes, as well as the routes to the south from Persia, viz. from Tún by Khaf, from Ghain, Subzwar, from Bisjund to Furrah, Herát and Lash. Moreover the routes leading out of Herát, or over which an army stationed here may be said to have the command are, 1. the route to Kábul by Bamian; 2. the route to the same place by Behsood; 3. the same from Merv by Bala Murghab; 4. the route by Balkh to Kábul; 5 and 6. two routes to Kandahar; 7. the route to Ghuzni through the Hazarah country; 8. the routes from Persia which lead through Subzwar, Furrah, Lash or Sēistan, and which all converge on Kandahar.

“ Besides all these positive and patent advantages which this place possesses, Russia in Herát would have an unassailable position, from which to threaten us in India, so as to force us to keep large forces always ready to meet the menace, while she would be able to cast abroad throughout India, that ‘ seething, festering mass of disaffection,’ the seeds of a rebellion that would still further cripple us, she would altogether alienate from us the whole of the Afgháns, and the Persian Khorásánis, and would practically control for her own purposes nearly all their military resources.”

In these remarks the whole case is contained. The conclusions, unfortunately, are irrefutable.

The principles which apply to the whole province apply equally to that northern portion of which is contained between the line of 1872 and the new line which the Russians are trying to enforce. The concession of that line would bring the Russian outposts to within a very short distance of Herát—not much greater than the distance between Dover and London. She would lie securely on

two rivers, each possessing a full stream and an unsurpassed power of fertilizing—each, as I shall show in the next chapter, opening out a route easy to be traversed. In desiring to acquire these districts Russia can have but one object, and that object the one which has been the end and aim of her Transcaspian struggles. To allow her to retain the Zulfagar Pass, Pul-i-Khátun and Pul-i-Kishti, with the country to the north of these places, would be as criminal and as fatal to the nation allowing it, as if the commander of a fortress were to permit a hostile army to encamp on the glacis. The conquest of Merv and the occupation of Sarakhs brought Russia near enough to Herát—but little longer than the distance which separates the British outposts from Kandahar. If we would preserve Herát from her clutches, if we would maintain India, we are bound to insist that the border line from Sarakhs to Khoja Saleh shall be scrupulously respected.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROUTES ON THE FRONTIER.

I PROPOSE now to describe the routes, and with the routes the nature of the country, from Herát along the Heri-rúd to Sarakhs; from the same place by the Khushk river to its junction with the Murgháb; and from Herát, also, by the Kala-i-nau valley to the Murgháb. In carrying out this plan I shall make free extracts from the journals of older travellers, men such as James Abbott, Vambéry, Marsh and MacGregor, and contrast their experiences with those of the companions of Sir Peter Lumsden who have written on the subject to the London papers.

I take first the route from Herát to Sarakhs along the Heri-rúd valley, based upon the experiences of Captain Marsh, who traversed the country in 1872, and of Sir C. MacGregor who visited it the following year:

Riding westward the first stage lands the traveller at Shakhwan a large group of three villages and a fort. The distance by the direct road is twenty-four miles, but to avoid the wet cultivation near the river it is often necessary to make a *détour* of eight miles, crossing the "Julgha or plain of Herát" "a sandy loam which bears good crops by irrigation."

The second journey is thirty-two miles to Sabash "a little, mean, dirty fort, barely habitable." The first part of the road takes the traveller along a network of canals as far as a ruined caravansarai; thence, along high grounds

at some distance from the river to the fort of Rozanak, about four miles from the town of Ghorian to the south of it, and from Rozanak across a vast gravel plain with distant hills on both sides to Sabash.

From Sabash to Kuhsan the distance is but twelve miles across the same gravel plain. Kuhsan is now in ruins, but in Sir Charles Macgregor's opinion it could easily be improved "so as to make it worthy of the frontier fort of a warlike nation." The same authority speaks with enthusiasm of the fertility of its soil. "Conducted," he writes, "into a most delightful garden, I bivouacked under the shade of some fine plane trees, by a tank of delicious clear water. After a good bath in the latter, it was a great luxury to lie back in one's bed, and devour, for nothing, bunch after bunch of glorious grapes, that at home would have ruined me." He makes special mention of the splendid gardens and vineyards in the vicinity of the town, as well as of its windmills, which likewise are to be found in great abundance about Rozanak. Regarding its position MacGregor writes: "The position of Kuhsan is one of considerable importance as being the first village in the valley of the Heri-rúd which would be reached by forces coming from the west, and the point on which the roads from Tarbut, Meshed, and Sarakhs join. It is therefore a place where there should be a fort of considerable strength, because an invader could not venture to pass it without taking it, and if it were able to offer a respectable resistance, it would necessitate his being detained long enough among the barren tracts to the west."

The fourth day's journey is to Chasma-Saoz, a distance of twenty-four miles. The road, which is good, traverses a plain on the left bank of the Heri-rúd. Supplies of all sorts are here abundant. This journey terminates in a pass, which, judging from the equal distance, sixty miles

from Sarakhs, can be no other than the Zulfagar Pass, recently seized by the Russians.

The fifth day takes the traveller to Pul-i-Khátun, twenty-eight miles. The road crosses the Kotal Ista-Khanchil pass, and then traverses hills, crossing to the right bank not far from Pul-i-Khátun. Though not good, it is practicable for guns. Not far from these hills, the most northern branch of the Heri-rúd takes the name of the Tejend. There is no village at Pul-i-Khátun, but forage is abundant. The bridge which gives its name to the locality is an old bridge of stone.

From Pul-i-Khátun to Sarakhs, the distance is thirty-two miles, the road level all the way, over a plain on the left bank of the river. At sixteen miles the fort of Kala Daolatábád is passed ; eight miles beyond, that of Naozabad.

Contrasting with this account is the graphic description of the same road, taken the reverse way, from Sarakhs down the valley, as recounted by Mr. Simpson, the special artist to the *Illustrated London News*, published by that paper, in its issue of the 21st March of the current year :

“ The march from Pul-i-Khátun to Kojeh Saham-ed-dia, and thence to Goolar, on our way to Kuhsan, was a very interesting one. The interest of it lies in its strategic features in relation to a force moving from Sarakhs on the line of the Heri-rúd towards Herát. From Sarakhs to Pul-i-Khátun the ground is open ; on the left or Persian side it may be called a plain the whole way ; but on the right bank a gentle rise begins at Kazil Koi, about eight miles south of Sarakhs. This rise assumes the character of a plateau or of undulating downs, all the way south to Pul-i-Khátun. Nowhere in that space is there any strong position of defence. At Pul-i-Khátun the whole character of the ground changes, the bed of the river becomes rocky, and

perhaps about a quarter of a mile distant a gorge presents itself. Here the strata stand nearly perpendicular, and the road leaves the river to pass over the spurs of the higher hills on the south. This gorge, with one or two small heights, and the spurs just mentioned, could be easily made very formidable, if not impregnable ; even as they are, a very small force could stop a very large one. Such is the position at Pul-i-Khátun itself ; and it forms the key of the whole strategic problem. It is the Elburz Range which bends eastward, or south-eastward, to be more correct, at one of its ridges, the ridge dips down to the Heri-rúd, disappears, and crops up again on the east side of the bridge, from which it slowly rises towards the Zulfagar Pass. It is a common feature of the hills in this region to be steep and rocky, almost precipitous, on the south and south-west ; while on the north the slope is easy. The ridge extending south-east from Pul-i-Khátun is of this character. For a few miles it is no great height, and there are one or two places where it might be passed by troops. The best place would be what is known as the Germáb Pass, about nine miles from Pul-i-Khátun ; this line takes the 'chord' of the curve which the river makes westward to Pul-i-Khátun. When the river is low, this pass is taken by travellers from its being the shortest line to Sarakhs. A force coming south could turn the position at Pul-i-Khátun by this pass, but if the defending force was large enough to extend along the whole ground to the Germáb Pass, it would have a strong position. The Germáb Pass, it will be understood, must form part of the whole position to be included as belonging to Pul-i-Khátun. South-east of the Germáb Pass, the ridge becomes so elevated and steep in parts that no force would try to surmount them. The next pass is that known as the Zulfagar ; its southern entrance must be about thirty miles from Pul-i-Khátun, and

the distance from leaving the river to the point where it is again touched by anyone coming through must be still greater; and I understand that no water is found in the pass itself. This will indicate one difficulty in marching troops by this line, on account of the want of water; and if there were a force defending the south end of the pass, the difficulty might be increased. The Zulfagar Pass is a very striking one, from the parallel ridges of level strata in the hills on each side, which rise to a great height.

“Kojeh Saham-ed-din is a saint's tomb, but our camp was at a spring of water about a mile from it. Our next march, to Goolar, was a very short one, being only eight miles. The deserted character of this part, since leaving Pul-i-Khátun, is even greater than anything we have yet passed. The ground has been cultivated at some former date; and we have seen spots on which towns have stood: now there is not an inhabited house all the way to Kuhsan. At Goolar we were in a piece of open country, with plains and heights, but of a small elevation, in comparison with the hills around.

“Our march from Goolar was at first for about seven or eight miles south, still on the west side of the Heri-rúd, which we had not seen since the march from Pul-i-Khátun—on that march we crossed it and re-crossed it again. Right across our line on leaving Goolar was the Kuh-i-Jam range; and our line south, over the lower ground, brought us to this range, which we began to ascend in a valley. On our left were four marked hills known as the Chakar Dowli—‘Chakar’ meaning four. Between two of these the Heri-rúd passes out from the Kuh-i-Jam into the open country between that and the high ranges at Zulfagar. The gorges of the river where it passes the Kuh-i-Jam are impassable for travellers; hence the necessity for going over the hills. Our route lay up the valley in a south-westerly direction.

Troops could march by this road, but nothing on wheels could pass. We stopped for the night at an open bit of ground, where there was a stream of good water, with trees. On the top of a hill are some bits of the walls of a fort, called Stoi, but the Persians call it Istoi, and this gives the name to the Pass. We were said to be about 4,000 feet above the sea at this place, and it was very cold. There were clouds and a few drops of rain or sleet."

The party had four days' marches yet to perform to reach Kuhsan.

The distance from Herát to Sarakhs by this road is only two hundred and two miles. If the British Government and the British people are insane enough to allow Russia to shorten that distance by sixty miles—and that is the distance between Sarakhs and the Zulfagar pass—to occupy a place which is valuable only for its position, for it does not even possess a hut—we ought not to be surprised if we are soon called upon to yield Herát likewise !

I turn now to Panjdeh—or group of five villages—a long way within the Afghán frontier proper. A glance at the following itinerary between Herát and Merv along the valley of the Murgháb, on which Panjdeh lies on the direct line, will show more clearly than any special description the enormous importance of the position. I quote mainly from Captain Abbott's journal.

From Herát, due north, to Parwána, is eleven miles. The road lies between close hills, of no considerable height, and ascends the entire way. Around this village are hills and plateaux producing wormwood, which is browsed by the wild antelope. There are many wells and a little cultivation.

From Parwána the road leads across the mountain ridge of Kaitú, north-eastward by north to Khúshk, a two days' journey. Captain James Abbott, who made it in the year 1840, turned the difficult passes of the highest ridge and

slept in a hollow where was a little water. From this he proceeded the next day "by a very distressing cross-country path, over steep hills covered with grass, to the rivulet Khúshk, whence we ascended to the capital of that name. The valley here is picturesque and interesting." The place, styled somewhat magniloquently as "the capital," is a small fort round which are mud houses and mud kibitkas or cabins. The valley of Khúshk is the dwelling-place of the Jamshidis, a tribe of Turkish origin, distinguished for their loyalty and their gallantry. The present condition of the place and the people is thus described by the *Times* correspondent in Bála Murgháb, from whom I have already quoted :—

"On December 2nd we entered by narrow defiles the valley in which the Jamshidi or Jemshid settlement of Khúshk is situated. It is about fourteen miles long and of an average width of three-fourths of a mile; the hills are of low, rounded clay, bare of trees, their sides dotted with villages of domed mud cabins. The irrigation from the river is profuse, and there is much cultivation on the top and sides of the hills, where rain crops are grown. The grain raised is only sufficient for the wants of the people, and except in opium there is no export trade. Every Jamshidi family has its own home-bred horses, small wiry animals fit for any amount of work. The Jamshidis themselves are a quiet, tractable people, extremely friendly and well disposed to us. They were the first nomad tribe we saw at home, for though they have their mud cabins they only live in them during the winter, and at other seasons they prefer their kibitkas, which they are always prepared to take up and walk. Perhaps I ought to explain what a kibitka—the home of the nomad, and a very comfortable home, too—is like. Kibitka is the Russian and Ev the Turkoman name. It is a dome-shaped framework of

lattice-work covered with layers of felt, the number of layers being in proportion to the severity of the weather. The walls for about 6ft. of their height are vertical and then the dome rises, its highest point being from 12ft. to 15ft. A felt cap fits on a hole in the centre of the roof which lets in the light—for the kibitka has no windows—when it is fine, and lets out the smoke when you light a fire on the ground underneath. The floor is generally spread with carpets of choice pattern, rich colours, and velvet softness, worked by the fair (?) fingers of the daughters of the kibitka; on the walls, too, hang camel bags, about 6ft. by 4ft., of the same rich carpet work. The great advantage of a kibitka is that in a few hours you can strike, pack up and load it on a camel and be off. Let Paterfamilias imagine the convenience of being able to put his comfortable house in the train and take it off to the seaside, and then he will understand that nomad life has its advantages. However, if on reading this description he wishes to send for a kibitka from Turkistan, he must not order a kibitka of such and such a size, but a kibitka which is a load for one, two, or more camels, as the case may be."

After dwelling upon the past recent history of this interesting tribe, and stating that, in the struggle between Ayúb Khán and Abdul Rahman the Jamshidis, having transferred their allegiance to the latter, had quitted Khúshk to take refuge in a less accessible valley, and had only returned when the cause of Ayúb Khán was irretrievably ruined, the writer thus continues:—

"However, the present Amir has moved 1,000 families back to Bálá Murgháb, an important strategic position which he wisely desired to colonize. Indeed, it was time that something of the sort were done, for, owing to overpopulation and over-irrigation the Khúshk valley had become very unhealthy, and the people were dying off fast

from a sort of enteric fever which has been rife there the last few years. Aminulla Khán is the Governor of Bálá Murgháb and Panjdeh. There are still about 4,000 families in Khúshk—every four families are supposed to furnish one horseman in ordinary times—and I was much struck by the painful contrast between their physique and that of Jamshidis living elsewhere. The Jamshidis claim to be descended from a Kaianian Chief, who obtained from Sháh Abbas the command of a military colony composed of horsemen belonging to different tribes of Herát, and to this colony he gave the name Jamshidi, from Jamshid, the apocryphal progenitor of the Paishdadian and therefore Kaianian family. Sháh Abbas gave a district in Badghis to the Colony, and round the Persian stem thus planted there gradually clustered all the waifs and strays of Herát, till the Jamshidis mustered some 60,000 families. During Nádir Sháh's reign, however, they were reduced to 12,000, and they now number only about 6,000 families—namely, 4,000 in Khúshk, 1,000 in Bálá Murgháb, and 1,000 in Kurukh at the foot of the Kaitú mountains, four miles from Herát. The Jamshidis resemble the Turkomans in dress and manners, but they are apparently a quiet, peaceable people. An English officer might safely live among them without any guard, and if they have only respite from raids and war they will doubtless spread over and multiply in the more healthy but deserted lands of Badghis. They are hardy, clever horsemen, and every household breeds its own horses. When we were in Khúshk the weekly fair was held; it was attended by many Turkomans from Panjdeh and by some Firuzkuhis, but by very few Hazarehs, with whom the Jamshidis are not on very friendly terms. The Turkomans brought salt, rice, soap, carpets, horses, sheep, and found for sale in the bazaar ploughshares (of cast iron) and hatchets from Maimené;

Russian and French loaf sugar, Austrian matches, also Bryant and May's, Meshed and Bokhára silk and cotton goods. The greater part of the latter was Russian, not English—let Manchester draw its own conclusion."

From this valley the traveller bent on reaching Merv can either follow the rivulet of Khúshk by Khushak Sian, Chahill Docktar, Kala Tapa, Chaman-i-Baid, Kila-i-Maur, Pal-i-Kishti to Panjdeh; or he can proceed by the more direct road to Kála-i-Nau, thence to Pul-i-Taban on the Murgháb, and follow that river also to Panjdeh. Captain Abbott followed the first route, which he thus describes:—"We passed down the valley of the Khúshk rivulet averaging about half a mile in width, and bounded on either side by sloping, grassy downs, sprinkled with flocks of sheep and goats. Under the low, sunny cliffs and hills the Jamshidis had pitched their black tents in considerable numbers; and in the fields of the valley hundreds of mares and colts were grazing. The scene was extremely pleasing. The valley is highly susceptible of culture, and has once been well tilled." Captain Abbot encamped that evening at a point on the river between Púshat Siah and Kála Tapa. The next day he marched along a similar country to the latter place; beyond that, the day following, to within two miles of Chaman-i-Baid. Beyond Kála Tapa he met large flocks of sheep. "The shepherds," he writes "come even from Merv to this pleasant valley bringing water and all other necessities on asses." The day after, as he marched to Kala-i-Maur, scenes almost similar met his gaze. "Large flocks of white sheep still sprinkled the hills on either side, but those hills were growing more arid and sandy as we advanced." Again, "We met not less than six or seven caravans of grain from Merv."

A few miles beyond Kala-i-Maur is Púl-i-Kishti* a spot

* Marked in Colonel Stewart's map simply by the word "Bridge."

which Russia has actually seized. It is only eight miles from Panjdeh. Here Abbott halted, and of it he wrote as follows: "Here the valley is about three-quarters of a mile in breadth. On the east bank are sloping sand hills, about 600 feet higher than the valley. On the west is the desert, a high sandy plain over-run with low bushes and camel thorn and extending to the mountain barrier of Persia." At Panjdeh to which he then proceeded, Abbott received the hospitality of the Turkomans who were then its occupants. He speaks of the desert as having been once populous and cultivated.

Not less interesting to us at the present moment is the alternative route by Kála-Nau and Moghor, to Pul-i-Taban on the Murgháb, and thence by way of Bála Murgháb and Maruchak to Panjdeh. Fortunately we are able, owing to the excellent correspondents of the London papers to see the country as it is at the present moment.

Kála-Nau is a valley which constitutes, so to speak, the capital of the Herát Hazáreh. It bears a strong resemblance to the Kúshk valley already described, except that it is smaller, more healthy, and more fertile. "The people," writes the *Times* correspondent, "are a branch of the Shiah Hazáreh of Hazáreh Jat, between Herát and Kábul, but, having become Sunis they have now no connexion with them." They are a very fine set of men, with pleasant frank faces, and with little trace of their Mongol origin. The influence of the present Amir over them is all-paramount:—"Every year," to quote from the same interesting source, "an increasing number of the Hazáreh still remaining in Persia join their brethren in the Kála-i-Nau valley, where there is plenty of room for them and many others. The Hazáreh were at one time very troublesome to their neighbours, but they are now well in hand, and to quote the words of a native writer, 'Before

Abdurrahman Khán became Amir the Hazáreh Chief could murder his political opponents, but now he cannot.' I must say that I would not like to be in Mahomed Khan's way, had he a chance of removing me. He is a shrewd, self-contained, determined little man, with a quick eye, which is always intensely fixed on his own interests. The Hazáreh's are very prosperous, not to say rich; their land is exceedingly fertile,—they have not much more to do than to sprinkle seed on the hill tops and wait for the friendly rain; and then, as they say, reap a hundredfold. Their chief wealth, however, is in cattle; of sheep they have enormous flocks. The Hazáreh's of Kála-Nau afford another proof that the Amir's authority is absolute and unquestioned."

I don't think I can do better than allow the writer to continue the journey to Bálá Murgháb and to give his account of that place in his own graphic style:

"From Kála-i-Nau we might have taken the same road as Grodekoff and Vambéry, who travelled from Bálá Murgháb by Talkguzar and the Darband pass, but it was not adapted to camel carriage, and accordingly we turned the mountains by following a stream which ran in a north-westerly direction through a succession of uncultivated valleys of great fertility, but at present only used by the nomad Ghilzais and Turkomans as grazing ground for their flocks. It was a long time since we had been in contact with Afgháns, and the discourteous manner—I daresay they could not help it—of these Ghilzais contrasted very unfavourably with the genial friendly attitude of the Char Aimaks and Hazáreh's. About 30 miles from Ab-i-Kamri, the stream we were following was turned in a northerly direction to the Khúshk river by a high hill which stood in our direct path, while we wheeled to the south-west into the Torshek valley. Five miles brought us to our camp-

ing-ground by the side of a stream of very indifferent water. Close at hand too, was a hot sulphur spring, which in ancient days was apparently conducted into a huge bath, canopied by a brick dome said to have been erected by Sháh Rokh. On the 12th of December we reached Bála Murgháb, and as we neared the place from the south-east, the guns of the fort fired a salute of seventeen guns in honour Sir Peter Lumsden, who simultaneously entered the valley from the opposite side. The river was about 60 yards broad at the ford by which we crossed it, and not less than 3 feet deep. The current was very rapid, and though the ford had been skilfully staked, the laden camels had considerable difficulty in crossing it, and some would assuredly have been lost had it not been for the ready help given by the Jamshidi horsemen, who when a camel slipped or drifted down the current, swarmed round him like flies, whipped off his load and dragged him into safety.

“We are greatly pleased by our winter quarters, and everybody is well and in good spirits. Our camp is surrounded on three sides by the river in a valley about seven miles long and one or two miles broad, which runs from south-west to north-east, and is enclosed between two ranges of rounded clay hills. At the southern extremity there is a deeply indented gorge in the grand mountains of the Tirbund-i-Turkistán (which runs west to east) through which the Murgháb tears its way. At the northern end of the valley the hills gradually contract into a narrow defile for a few miles, when they again open out into the valley of Karaolkhana. Twice again do the hills thus contract and expand into the valleys of Meruchak and Panjdeh respectively. Panjdeh, I should add, is about forty-six miles from here. I have already explained that the Amir has colonized Bála Murgháb from among the Jamshidis, Firuzkuhis and Hazáras. This was a wise step, for Bála

Murgháb is a very important position strategically, situated as it is on the high road from the capital of Afghán Turkistán, and, perhaps, when the Russian flotilla of steamers is ready to navigate the Oxus, from Kerki to Herát. But it is not the sort of place that a timid English spinster lady would select as a residence, surrounded as it is, or to speak more accurately, as it was, by marauding Turkomans, unruly Aimaks, and the turbulent Uzbeks of Maimené. But now the Turkomans are tamed, the Char Aimaks peaceful, and Maimené has been subdued. Bála Murgháb is consequently a safe habitation. The colonies established there seem contented and prosperous. On the left or opposite bank to us there are the Firuzkuhi and Hazáreh colonies, and on this bank the Jamshidi colony. The happy family is awed into harmony by the fort with an Afghán garrison, and every day when we attempt to go out for a ride the flooded fields and numerous water-cuts remind us that the work of reclamation is being rapidly pushed on. I cannot say there is pretty scenery, though, no doubt, it is grand scenery, but there is the same want of trees which has characterized nearly every district we have marched through."

The route referred to by the correspondent as having been followed by Grodekoff and Vambéry, and which is the shortest and most direct route, is thus described by the latter :—"It is reckoned a four days journey for horses from Bála Murgháb to Herát. Camels require double the time, for the country is mountainous. . . . Two high mountainous peaks visible to the south of Bála Murgháb, were pointed out to us, and we were told that it would take us two days to reach them. They both bear the name Durbend (pass), and are far loftier, narrower, and easier of defence than the pass on the right bank of the Murgháb, leading to Maimené. In proportion as one advances

nature assumes a wilder and more romantic appearance. The elevated masses of rock which form the first Derbend, are crowned with the ruins of an ancient fort, the subject of the most varying fables. Further on, at the second Derbend, on the bank of the Murgháb, there are the remains of an old castle. It was the summer residence of the renowned Sultan Husén Mirza, by whose order a stone bridge—Pul-i-Taban—was constructed, of which traces are still distinguishable. In the time of this, the most civilized sovereign of Central Asia, the whole of the neighbourhood was in a flourishing state, and many pleasure-houses are said to have existed along the course of the Murgháb.

“Beyond the second pass we quitted the Murgháb. The route turned to the right, in a westerly direction, towards a plateau closely adjoining a part of the desert peopled by the Salor. Here begins the lofty mountain, Telkhguzar, which it takes three hours to pass over.

“Towards midnight we halted at a place called Moghor, whence, next morning, we reached the ruins of the former town and fortress, Kála-Nau, now surrounded by a few tents of the Hazáreh.”

Of Bálá Murgháb Vambery thus wrote ; “this part of the valley of the Murgháb bears the name of Bálá Murgháb ;” (from the fortress of that name) “it extends from the frontiers of the lofty mountainous chain of the Hazáreh as far as Maruchak, where dwell the Salor Turkomans : it is said of old to have been a possession of the Jamshidis, and that they were for a time dispossessed and afterwards returned. To the south-west of the fortress the valley becomes so narrow that it merits rather the name of a defile. Through the midst the Murgháb rolls foaming away with the noise of thunder,—it is not until it has passed Panjdeh, where the river becomes deeper and more sedate that the

valley spreads itself out and acquires a breadth of one or two miles."

Bálá Murgháb is 46 miles south-east of Panjdeh, Maruchak, also on the Murgháb, being about halfway between the two.

The following notes, by Captain Arthur F. Barrow, Aide-de-Camp on the staff of Sir Peter Lumsden, as to the military value of Pul-i-Khátun, were published in the *Illustrated London News* of the 14th March last:—

"From Sarakhs as far as Pul-i-Khátun, movement on either bank presents no difficulties. To Daulatábád, twelve miles south of Sarakhs, both banks are level; from that to Pul-i-Khátun, the right bank dominates, and all movements on the right bank are under cover, and fully concealed from observation from the left bank; while, on the other hand, no military movement whatever could possibly be carried on upon the left bank, within, at least, six miles of the river, without full cognizance of the right bank. The river itself, by reason of its depth and width, is nowhere a military obstacle. At Pul-i-Khátun, the road passes through a narrow gorge; it is a mere track with steep gradients, and thence, as far as Goolar, would present great difficulties to the advance of even a small flying column with the lightest guns. Without weeks of labour, it could not be relied upon as a main line of communication practicable for heavy artillery with its ammunition column, with the ambulance and the heavy-wheeled transport and impedimenta of a large army. The river is, on the east side, shut out from Badghis by a steppe, which drops precipitously into it, the cliffs averaging from 150ft. to 200ft. in height. In this curtain there are two gaps, by which access to the river is obtained, called respectively the Germáb and Zulfagar Passes. From Goolar, our route lay to the west of the river, which passes, it is said, through

an impracticable gorge ; several other routes are, however, available—one by way of Zorabad, where water is found ; and there is said to be very little natural obstacle to an advance beyond Goolar by those routes. Enough has been said here to show that the possession of Pul-i-Khátun, by any Power which anticipates advancing on Herát in the future, is a desideratum of considerable value ; for access to the Pass would naturally result in the immediate construction of a good road, along a stream of excellent water. At the same time, it must not be overlooked that the impenetrable nature of the cliffs on the east bank of the river, render the use of this route, as a main line of advance, open to the very serious military objection that no lateral communication could exist with parallel lines of advance on that side ; and that, in any combined movement, the force using this road might be met and defeated, at its exit, by a superior force of the enemy, while the other columns were being detained by inferior forces, occupying strong defensive positions. The occupation of Pul-i-Khátun by a weak Power, opposed to the advance of an army on Herát, and by one to which, owing to distance from its base, paucity of troops, or want of money, the conversion of Pul-i-Khátun into a defensive position is an impossibility, would at any rate result in the road remaining in its present condition ; and would thereby deny its use to an enemy, at least for some considerable time after the declaration of hostilities."

The city of Kuhsan is thus described in the same paper, of the same date :—

" Kuhsan, sixty-eight miles from the city of Herát, on the frontier of the Persian Territory of Khorasán, stands on the Heri-rud where that river bends from a westerly to a northerly direction. The Heri-rud, a beautiful river fertilising and enriching the valleys of north-western

Afghánistán, rises in the highlands of Hazáreh, and flows from east to west between the broad mountain range which the Greeks named the Paropamisus, now called the Safed Koh or "White Mountain," and the Siah Koh, to the city of Herát, and thence to Ghorian, where it turns north-west to Kuhsan. This district, copiously irrigated by artificial canals, was once populous and wealthy; it is one of the most ancient seats of civilization. In the Middle Ages, during at least four centuries, Herát was one of the finest cities, and its province one of the most productive, in Central Asia. From Kuhsan to Sarakhs, by the road following the course of the Heri-rud, the distance is eighty-four miles. This is the road on which the Russians have recently advanced more than half way, seizing Pul-i-Khátun, nearly forty miles from Sarakhs, and recently the Zulfagar Pass, thirty miles higher up the river, where an opening through the wall of cliffs on the eastern bank gives access to the interior of Badghis, and through Ak Robat to the Khúshk valley and the Murgháb."

Panjdeh, and the road thence to Maruchak—the place above Bála Murgháb—are thus described by Mr. Simpson, special artist to the same paper. If the reader will recollect, the Russians claim to draw the new frontier line just above Maruchak (Little Merv):

"We stopped a day at Ak Tapa, and then moved on to Panjdeh. About six miles to the south nearly the whole distance is covered with Sarok villages, formed of kibitkas. The Sarok Turkomans have come south from the Merv district, and have become Afghán subjects. The Murgháb, as well as the Khúshk valley, was without inhabitants, and its fields were lying waste. Some years ago the Saroks arrived, and they have restored the place to life again. Some of their chiefs came along the Khúshk valley, and met Sir Peter Lumsden on the third march from Ak Tápa; crowds of the Sariks turned out to see our arrival, and the

outskirts of the camp were generally fringed with them, eager to look at the Feringhis, and watch what they were doing. There was a good deal of trade going on in the purchase of carpets, and other articles, by our people. A considerable quantity of Indian rupees and Persian cráns was left among them, so we may suppose that they will retain a pleasant recollection of us. At Panjdeh we remained two days; one of these days was principally occupied by a visit from the Governor of Herát, who had followed us up; and Sir Peter Lumsden paid a visit to Yalintúsh Khán, the chief of the Jamshidis.

“There are the ruins, little more than mounds, of an old fort, and the evident remains of a town around it; these also are nothing more than mounds, on the west side of the river. A man called it “Kona Pendie,” by which he meant old Panjdeh. If there is a new Panjdeh, we did not see it, unless it be the kibitka villages of the Sariks, and they extend for over twenty miles along both banks of the Murgháb. We were scarcely prepared for such a large sized river as we found here. It is as wide as Regent Street, of considerable depth, with a large volume of bluish-grey water flowing steadily past. When towns of importance, equal to those we have traced the remains of, come into existence again on its banks, “penny boats” will be shooting along from pier to pier. Fords are very few, and the one we crossed at Maruchak had at least four feet of water in its deepest part. I heard some one estimate the breadth of the valley at Panjdeh as about four or five miles; whether this is exact or not, there is a large width of ground, which had been cultivated when the valley was prosperous and full of inhabitants. The mounds were the remains of large towns, and they are a sure evidence of the population that once existed and found subsistence on the banks fertilized by the waters of the Murgháb.

“The march to Bund-i-Nadri was along the western side of the valley ; about half way, the sandy hills on this side project considerably into the plain, narrowing it very much. Our road ascended the heights, but about a mile or so to the south we descended again, and found the valley nearly as wide as at Panjdeh. Our camp was pitched on a piece of level ground close to the hills. The Bund-i-Nadri was not far from us, but it turned out to be the old bund, which had been made on a bed of the river, which the water of the Murgháb had forsaken, and a new bund, or dam, higher up, was mentioned as having been made. The Bund-i-Nadri canal, a large watercourse for irrigation, flowed past close to us ; it was filled with a beautiful clear stream. This is the canal whose water had been led, at some former period, across the Pul-i-Khisti.

“Our next march was also on the western side of the valley, along the base of the hills ; and again we left the level soil, to pass through a hollow among them, which extended for some miles. On coming out again on the valley, we passed a Turkoman village, which I understood was the last of them towards the south. We struck across the valley to the river, where there are the piers only of a brick bridge standing. At this place there is a ford, which we crossed. Sir Peter Lumsden placed a number of Turkomans across the river, along the whole line of the ford, thus carrying out the military rule, which was very necessary, as the ford was far from being a straight line, and the current was strong. By this means all got over in perfect safety ; even mild Hindús, on very small baggage-animals, who smoke and sleep instead of looking out where they are going, crossed scatheless. Our camp was formed close to the ford, and for the first time on the right bank of the Murgháb.

“Maruchak is on the same side ; it is some distance from the river, and little over a mile from the ford. We were

rather surprised at the extent of its walls, which would imply that the place had been inhabited at a later period than the other ruined towns we had seen. Our party found pheasants very plentiful at Maruchak, and there was some good shooting there. From Maruchak to Karaul Khaneh, which was the ground of our next march, has not yet been repeopled, and the whole space is at present in the condition of a vast game preserve. The birds flew up in great numbers, and when the sportsmen came in, covering the ground with long rows of dead pheasants, the only complaint heard referred to the deficiency of cartridges.

“After passing Maruchak, the hills change in their form; below that place they are undulating and rounded, but the curves have a very long radius. Above Maruchak they form small rounded knobs, with steep sides, all the way up to Bála Murgháb, to the south of which the geology entirely changes. The march from Maruchak to Karaoul Khaneh was on the right bank of the river. Towards the end of the march, we struck to the left, through a gorge formed by the steep sides of these mamelon hills, and came out again about a mile farther on. Karaoul Khaneh is the site of an old town; judging by the mounds, it had not been of great size. Here a valley comes in from the left, and, had the first idea of winter quarters beyond the Murgháb been carried out, we were to have moved in that direction. But a change had been made, and Bála Murgháb had been determined upon, so from Karaul Khaneh we marched, still on the right bank of the river, and came on here, arriving on Dec. 12.”

The above extracts, made from many independent sources, will not fail, I believe, to convey to the reader a tolerable idea of the nature of the country of Herát, and of the immense importance to England of the continued possession by Afghánistán of the border line conceded to it in 1872—the straight line between Sarakhs and Khoja Saleh.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ARMIES ON BOTH SIDES.

As I write, this morning of the 25th of March, the air is full of rumours regarding a Russian advance on Herát. If they should prove true, it will devolve upon Peter Lumsden to play in 1885 the part which Eldred Pottinger played in 1838; to aid in the defence of the Pearl of Khorásán, until a British army can reach that city from the Pishin valley. In this view of the possibilities it is incumbent to glance, not only at the respective forces of the two nations, but at the distances which each must traverse before the battle ground can be reached.

On the subject of the armaments of Russia the *Daily News* appears to be singularly well-informed. In the issue of that paper of the 19th March appeared a statement of the numbers, composition, and distribution of the Russian forces in Central Asia, so important as to draw to it the attention of every politician and every soldier. Inquiries I made in other quarters likely to be well-informed, have satisfied me that the statement is in all essential points correct. It is as follows:—

The army of the Caucasus has not recently executed any movement indicative of dismemberment, and is still in that part of the country with the following exceptions :

1. Battalions of light infantry formed in 1880, and since that time quartered in the Trans-Caspian provinces :

No. 1, at Krassnovodsk.

No. 2, at Geok Tepé.

Nos. 3, 5, 6, at Askabad.

No. 4, at Tschikisjlar.

2. Cossacks.

Two regiments and two squadrons of Koubane Cossacks.

3. First Battalion of Railway Reserve.

ARMY OF TURKISTAN.

INFANTRY. FIRST BRIGADE.

1st Batt.	}	Transferred to Taschkend, their habitual quarters, in the circumscription of Sir Daria.
10th „		
12th „		

SECOND BRIGADE.

3rd Batt.	}	Transferred from Samarkhand to Saravschan.
6th „		
8th „	}	...Transferred from Kattibourgan to Saravschan
9th „		
11th „	}	Transferred from Samarkhand to Saravschan
19th „		

THIRD BRIGADE.

7th „	}	Transferred from	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>{</td> <td>Osch</td> <td rowspan="4">}</td> <td rowspan="4">to</td> </tr> <tr> <td>{</td> <td>Namangan</td> </tr> <tr> <td>{</td> <td>Andischan</td> </tr> <tr> <td>{</td> <td>Kokand</td> </tr> </table>	{	Osch	}	to	{	Namangan	{	Andischan	{	Kokand	Ferghana.
{				Osch	}			to						
{				Namangan										
{				Andischan										
{	Kokand													
4th „														
16th „														
18th „														

FOURTH BRIGADE.

2nd „	}	Transferred from Marghellane to Ferghana.
14th „		
15th „		
20th „		

The 5th, 13th, and 17th Battalions do not form part of the above-named brigades. The 5th has been transferred

Four battalions of light infantry are in garrison at Taschkend.

1st	Battery at Samarkhand	8 heavy pieces.
2nd	„ at Taschkend	8 nine-pounders.
3rd	„ at Andiskhan	8 light pieces.
4th	„ at Samarkhand	8 light pieces.
5th	„ at Taschkend	8 four-pounders.
6th	„ { at Petro Alex- androvski }	8 mountain guns, 3-pounders.
7th	„ at Samarkhand	8 mountain guns, 2½.

FORTRESS ARTILLERY.

ENGINEERS.

Half a Battalion of Sappers }
1 Detachment of Artisans } at Taschkend.

REGIMENTS OF ORENBURGH COSSACKS.

No. 5. Squadrons 1, 2, and 3, at Taschkend; 4, in Fort
No. 1.

One battery of Mounted Cossacks is at Taschkend.

No. 2. Squadrons 1, 2, 3, and 4, at Samarkhand.

TROOPS FROM THE CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF OMSK.

Infantry.—Brigade of the Line of Western Siberia.

3rd Batt.,	transferred from	Djarkent	} To Sémérétschinsk.
5th	„	Kaurakol	
6th	„	Kopal	
7th	„	Verni	
8th	„	Verni	
1st	„	Omsk to Akmolinsk.	
2nd	„	Garrison to Sémipalatinsk.	
4th	„	Fort Saisanski to Sémipalatinsk.	

At Tobolsk, Tomsk, Omsk, and Sémipalatinsk there are also four battalions of reserve with the cadres for five companies each.

Besides these there are at Omsk another separate detachment and a military prison company. In several other towns and forts of Western Siberia there are altogether 44 separate detachments.

FIELD ARTILLERY.

1st Battery at Verni	...	8 light pieces.
2nd	„ Djarkend	8 light pieces.
3rd	„ Kaurakol	8 mountain guns (3-pounders).
4th	„ Saisanski	8 pieces of small calibre and 2 mountain guns (3-pounders).

FORTRESS ARTILLERY.

One company at Verni.

ENGINEERS.

One company of Sappers at Omsk.

IRREGULAR TROOPS.

REGIMENTS OF SIBERIAN COSSACKS.

No. 1. Squadron 2 at Ochonitchi, 3 at Kuldja, 5 at Kold-schat, 1, 4, and 6 in Fort No. 4.

No. 2. Squadrons 2, 3, and 6 at Lepsinsk, 1 at Bachti, 4 near the river Chorgos, 5 at Djarkent.

No. 3. Squadrons 1 and 3 at Saisanski, 2 and 5 at Koton-Karagai, 4 at Kokpekti, 6 at Tschagan-Obinski.

REGIMENT OF SEMERETSCHINSK COSSACKS.

Squadrons 2 and 4 at Verni, 1 at Djarkend, 3 at Narishu.

As to the composition and means of transport of their army, we are not without accurate information. Two days after the statement I have extracted from the *Daily News*, was published, there appeared in the *Times* a very interesting paper "On the Army of the Caucasus." Interesting as this paper is—and the reader is now again afforded the opportunity of re-perusing it—there are some points in it which seem to invite special remark.

"The operations of the Russian forces in Turkomania, of which the latest feature has been the seizure of places within the accepted boundary of Afghánistán, have attracted greater attention to the army of the Caucasus, which supplies the garrison of the Czar's recently-acquired possessions east of the Caspian. A great deal has been said about the formidable power of this portion of the Russian forces, and some military authorities have gone so far as to assume that half its strength would be available for a campaign against Herát, and that, without considering the armies of Turkistan and Orenburg at all, Russia could despatch from the Caspian, within a reasonable period of time, an army of nearly 100,000 men. The best way to ascertain how far these opinions may be deemed reasonable is to consider the actual composition and organization of the army which has its base and head-quarters at Tiflis.

"The army of the Caucasus has been roughly computed at 200,000 men, but in order to arrive at that total, all its

details must be included, reserve, irregulars, and Cossacks. The regular army of the Caucasus numbers 70,000 men, but its reserve of another 50,000 would raise it to 120,000 strong. Besides this force of the line there are 30,000 Georgian and Imeritian irregulars of horse and foot. The Cossacks established in the settlements north of the Caucasian range, represent another section of the armed forces of the Tiflis Governorship, and they are expected to supply a quota of 50,000 men. These separate totals make up the grand result of 200,000 men, and this force may be properly compared and contrasted with the Anglo-Indian army of about the same nominal strength. It resembles that force in another respect which is too often obscured. A very large proportion of the army of the Caucasus is non-Russian. The Cossacks, Circassians, Georgians, and others form the majority of the troops whom Prince Don-doukoff-Korsakoff could array in time of war. The 70,000 men who are permanently engaged in garrison duty south of the Caucasus are distributed between Batoum, Tiflis, Kars, and other fortified places on the Turkish and Persian frontiers. They have also to furnish the troops employed in the Askabad district, and these number about 15,000 men, of whom 9,000 are in positions east of Bami. It is quite certain that any extra work thrown upon this portion of the Russian army would immediately necessitate the calling out of the reserves, who are really nothing more or less than military colonists who receive a grant of land and are allowed to marry after serving five years with the colours. The calling out of the reserves, and the increase of the Cossack regiments by the corps drawn from the steppe, would be the preliminaries to placing the army of the Caucasus on a war footing; but even then there would be plenty of work on its hands. It is within the range of possibility that the Russians could increase

General Komaroff's army to 50,000 men if they were left undisturbed in Armenia and on the Black Sea. But that task could only be executed at the cost of a great effort, and after the preparation of many months. In 1881, when Russia threw herself into the work of repairing the defeat of Geok Tepé and crushing the Turkomans, she succeeded in placing 25,000 troops on the eastern shores of the Caspian, but the preparations took nearly twelve months. Her permanent garrison in the Askabad province is now, as already stated, 15,000 men, and she has a railway from near Krasnovodsk to Bami. There is nothing incredible in the supposition that under these improved conditions she could in the course of the summer place 50,000 men on the northern borders of Persia.

"The composition of even the regular regiments of the army of the Caucasus is heterogeneous. Russians form a majority, but there are numerous Armenians, Poles, Jews, Tartars, and Russo-Germans. Circassians are also largely to be met with, particularly in the cavalry. But even the regular troops are subjected to a very light discipline, and if there is anything in our and German ideas as to military efficiency they can be little better than militia. A recent military traveller, who knows the Caucasus and Armenia well, and who does not conceal his identity under the pseudonym of "Wanderer," has given in his interesting "Notes on the Caucasus" the following description of the military routine of the regular army :—

"They have very few parades and absolutely no pipe-clay ; a company or two is paraded daily during the summer months for rifle practice under the adjutant and musketry instructor, and the corps is assembled once a month for muster. The rest of the time the men do much as they choose, and usually either work at trades, selling the product of their industry at a sort of market which is

held every Sunday in the bazaar of the town, or hire themselves out at so much per diem to private individuals as porters, labourers, &c."

"This sort of life is very different from the sustained military exercise to which our troops in India are accustomed, and, although the conclusion may be unsound, it will be generally considered that these soldiers would stand but a poor chance against our highly-trained European and Indian regiments. The Cossacks are excellent for all the purposes of irregular warfare, but they never have been trusted by any Russian General against a disciplined army in the open field, and of the 50,000 men whom Russia might place east of the Caspian one-half would be Cossacks, as they are the most easy to mobilize and send on foreign service. The Cossack cavalry have attached to them a certain number of six-gun batteries of horse artillery, and these move about with them in the field. The regular artillery of the Caucasus numbers forty-three batteries of eight guns each, or 344 guns in all, and whereas the horse artillery consists of six-pounders the field artillery is composed of Krupp's nine-pounder steel breech-loading guns. The artillery is unquestionably the most efficient part of the army. The officers are well trained, and the men are specially picked for the service. The guns are admirably horsed and equipped. There are also a few batteries for mountain operations. With regard to the Georgian and other irregulars, it is declared that they are not inferior to the Russian regulars; but it is highly improbable that they would be employed outside the Caucasus. It is, of course, impossible to gauge with any degree of accuracy the comparative efficiency of two armies which are organized on two different systems and which have never met in war; but while admitting the merit of the Russian soldier, who is stated, without any excessive exaggeration,

to be "capable of going anywhere on black bread and water," it does seem as if the superiority in military efficiency and military resources rested with the Anglo-Indian army rather than with that of the Caucasus.

"We have some practical experience of what the army of the Caucasus can do in actual warfare. In 1877, on the outbreak of the Turkish war, it could only place 50,000 men on the frontier, although preparations for war were begun in 1876. This force proved inadequate to cope with the Turks under Mukhtar Pasha, and the Russians were, as a matter of fact, repulsed all along the line in their first attempt to invade Armenia. At one period of the campaign, had the Turks pushed their advantage with greater vigour, or perhaps it would be more correct to say had they been better provided with the sinews of war, they could hardly have failed to achieve a decided success; but they allowed the opportunity to slip by, and when the winter of 1877 began the Russians had succeeded in arraying 100,000 men between Erivan and Poti. It must be remembered that this was only accomplished under compulsion and by a great effort. Yet the concentration of troops was on the nearest frontier of the Russian dominions, and the blow to be struck was against an enemy within 150 miles of Tiflis. Any campaign against Herát—for if war ensues Russia's objective will, of of course, be the town on the Heri-rúd—would be of an entirely different character. Herát is 1,200 miles from Tiflis, and nearly 400 from Askabad; and although an army might be sustained once Herát is reached, most of the supplies for this force *en route* would have to be carried with it, after making the most liberal allowance for what might be drawn from Meshed and Northern Persia. The Russians, it is true, have 4,000 men on the Murgháb and nearly 5,000 between Askabad and Zulfagar, and those two

corps, increased by a large Turkoman gathering from Merv, would undoubtedly suffice at this moment to overcome all opposition outside the walls of Herát. But in the event of Russia committing herself to the irrevocable step of an act of hostility against the Amir, it is clear that, although an initial success might be scored, it would be a matter of extreme difficulty, if not an utter impossibility, to raise the advanced army to anything like the large numbers that would be necessary in face of the joint opposition of the Afghan and Indian armies. We exclude from our calculations the effect that would be produced by an Anglo-Turkish alliance and the appearance of 20,000 English troops in Armenia. There is nothing chimerical in either proposition, and the army of the Caucasus is so far isolated that its communications with the rest of Russia are exceedingly difficult and subject to interruption. The army of the Caucasus will some day be more formidable than it is now, and when the railway system on the Western side of the Caspian as well as on the eastern is complete, it may be possible for Russia to throw the whole of her military resources into the effort to place 100,000 men on the Afghan borders. At present she could do nothing of the kind even with twelve months' preparation. The conviction that these facts are patent at Tiflis must strengthen the belief in a pacific settlement of the present difficulty, at the same time that they show that Russia has not the available power to maintain the aggressive position she has taken up on the rivers Murgháb and Heri-rúd, and that we have only to be firm in our declarations and to stand stanchly by the Ameer, to insure the speedy evacuation of those places south of Sarakhs and Yulatan which General Komaroff and Colonel Alikhanoff have within the last four months appropriated by force."

The sentences in this paper which appear to me to invite special attention, are those which speak of the difficulties which Russia would encounter in the event of her precipitating hostilities with the Amir. These difficulties may thus be classified :

1. The raising of the advanced army to anything like the large numbers that would be necessary in face of the joint opposition of the Afghán and Indian armies.
2. The danger that the Russian army might be isolated.
3. The difficulty of furnishing it with supplies.

I propose to consider these three points in detail.

Leaving for consideration further on the question of the entire force disposable in India, I would ask the reader to accept with me for a moment the statements which have reached us from that country by telegram, that there is at this moment a force of 30,000 men in the Pishin valley ready to advance by way of Kandahar as soon as they shall receive the order from Head Quarters. Accepting this statement, we must ask these two questions : what is the distance to be traversed ; and how long will it take to traverse it.

The distance from the present advanced posts of the Anglo-Indian army to Kandahar is about 145 miles ; from Kāndahár to Herát is 369 miles. It is not easy marching, even when there is no enemy to be looked for. In the second Afghán war Stewart found the march even to Kandahar a very trying one. Unfortunately the intervening time has not been employed in the manner to which it might have been so usefully devoted—the making of a railway. Our armies will have to march as they did in 1839 and 1879-80. The difficulties, especially in the way

of collecting carriage for such a force, will be as great now as they were then. Those who recollect how in 1881 Phayre's force was detained in inaction, at a critical moment, for the want of carriage, will appreciate the great extent of those difficulties.

The road to Kandahar is well known to our generals and our soldiers. I think that, having regard to the initial difficulties of starting, the best of these would admit that if he were to receive the order to advance to-morrow, he would think a fortnight not a day too long to enable him to reach Kandahar with 30,000 men. Sir John Keane, in 1839, marching as rapidly as he could march, took nineteen days to accomplish the distance from Quetta. Thence to Herát the road is less known, but it is certainly infinitely more difficult. I propose, in a few words, to describe it.

There are three important posts on the principal road between Kandahar and Herát—Girishk, Farrah, and Sabzwár. The distance by this road is 369 miles.

From Kandahar to Girishk the distance barely exceeds 75 miles.

The first march is to Kokáran—7 miles. The first 3 miles of road pass through the enclosed gardens and suburbs of the city. The road crosses the several canals drawn from the Argandáb for irrigating the Kandahar valley. At Kokáran water is abundant, the encamping-ground is well adapted for a large force, and forage can be supplied in sufficient quantities.

To Sanjári—5 miles. The bed of the Argandáb is crossed. The river, in the month of June, averages about two-and-a-quarter feet in depth, and the passage of it is easy. There is a ford about three-quarters of a mile lower down by which it would be advisable to cross heavy guns. Beyond the river one or two artificial watercourses have to be crossed. The road is stony in some places, but

generally good. There is excellent encamping-ground at Sanjari ; water is plentiful, and forage is sufficient.

To Hauz-i-Maddad Khán—14 miles. An excellent road across a broad, hard, level plain. A canal runs parallel to the road the whole of the march. The ground for encampment is good ; water is plentiful near the camp ; forage for camels is abundant ; grass is scarce near the camp, but plentiful a few miles to the south of it. There are several villages in the neighbourhood ; as well as flocks of sheep and goats.

Khúshk-i-Nakhúd—15 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles. A hard, level, gravel road without obstacle or difficulty. At Khúshk-i-Nakhúd water is plentiful, from two artificial water-courses ; the encamping-ground is good ; fodder for camels is plentiful ; but grass, in the immediate vicinity of the camp, is scarce.

To Khak-i-Chapan—9 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles. The road generally good and level, though here and there the sand lies deep. The encamping-ground, though somewhat irregular, could easily be occupied by a large force. There is a sufficient, though not over-abundant, supply of water. Forage of all sorts is less plentiful. There are, however, villages and cultivation two or three miles south of the encamping-ground, as well as large flocks of sheep.

To Girishk—not quite 24 miles. The road to the left bank of the Helmund, about twenty-two miles and a half, is generally good and hard, the first part slightly undulating, with one or two sandy patches. There is a well about midway, but the water procurable from it is insufficient for more than a few travellers. On the left bank of the river is an excellent encamping-ground, with abundance of water and an ample supply of forage of all sorts. The Helmund is a difficult river to cross. In June its depth is about three feet nine inches ; its width in the widest branch is seventy yards. The current runs at the rate

of three miles an hour. There is a ferry which it is sometimes necessary to use. At Girishk the encamping-ground is sufficient, though here and there broken. Water and supplies of all sorts are abundant. I would add that, so far, the country is well known to our generals; it comprehends the districts which, as I have stated in a preceding page, would devolve upon us in the event of a permanent occupation of Kandahar by the British.

What Girishk once was may be gathered from the traditions of the time of Zaman Sháh. Even then people used to say that "the Helmund flowed through a garden." Now, though arable land abounds, there is but little cultivation. In fact, with the exception of the land immediately on the bank of the river, there is none. With peace and security for life the cultivation, however, would speedily revive!

The fort, though much dilapidated, commands a good view of the surrounding country. It is not, at present, capable of defence against artillery, but it might be made so with a comparatively small expenditure.

From Girishk to Farrah the distance, by the route adopted by Ferrier and Marsh, is 120 miles. There is a route by Shoráb and Hasan Gilan, shorter by 20 miles, but of this I have been unable to find any accurate record.

Girishk to Zirak—20 miles. The first six miles stony and undulating, the beds of several torrents crossing the line. The road then becomes level and easy till the fort of Saadat, 18 miles from Girishk, is reached. Saadat, once a rather strong, but, when Captain Marsh saw it in 1873, a deserted and ruined hill fort, has a plentiful supply of water. The road then becomes again undulating and continues so until close to Zirak. Zirak is a small village situated at the foot of the mountains on the

right of the road to Herát and opposite Mahmudabad, described by Captain Marsh as a small village in a hollow watered by an artificial watercourse. At Zirak water is good and abundant, and forage for camels and horses is plentiful.

To Dúshakh—12½ miles. The road hard and level. Water at the village of Súr, about half-way. The encamping-ground at Dúshakh is good, and forage for camels and horses is abundant.

To Biabanak—three miles and a half. Road level, across a tolerably hard plain. There is an artificial canal at Biabanak providing plenty of water. Grass and fodder are abundant.

To Washir—24 miles. About four miles from Biabanak the road enters a range of hills with a gradual ascent to 900 feet, presenting no great difficulties. From this point to Washir the road winds among declivities, and follows the bed of watercourses, passing over much difficult ground. For the last 9 miles the road runs down a valley, with a gentle slope. It is hard and good till within 2 miles of Washir, when it becomes undulating and stoney. Many villages and gardens, watered by artificial canals are passed in this descent. Ferrier made the journey by halting during the heat of the day at Biabanak and then pushing on across the range, 20 miles, to Painak, but with no advantage over the route here laid down. At Washir supplies of all sorts, including water, are abundant.

To the Káshrúd river—14 miles. The road stoney and uneven, the last 4 miles being along a dry watercourse. The descent into the bed of the Káshrúd steep and bad. It is, however, practicable for artillery. The river supplies excellent water. Forage for camels abounds, but grass is less plentiful.

To Hájí Ibráhímí—14 miles. The fording of the Káshrúd is at certain seasons impossible, in consequence of the impetuosity of the torrent. In the hot season, however, the depth of the water does not exceed 18 inches. After crossing the river the road pursues a tortuous course among hills for about 3 miles; it then crosses a dreary steppe till it reaches Hájí Ibráhímí. Ferrier states that between Hájí Ibráhímí and Káshrúd there is not a drop water. Water and forage are both procurable at the former place.

Hájí Ibráhímí to Siah-áb—Ferrier calls this place Shiaguz—distance 10 miles. Siah-áb is the point whence a direct road, avoiding alike Farrah and Sabzwar, runs *viâ* Giraneh to Herát. It is an encamping-ground where water and forage are alike available.

Siah-áb to Kharmálik—22 miles. The first and last part of this stage leads the traveller through plains, fields, and marshes. The intermediate part is intersected by stony mountains, steeply scarped at the sides. "Kharmálik," writes Captain Marsh, "is situated in a small grassy hollow. A few date-palms and cattle, in the immediate neighbourhood of a few mean huts and wall-surrounded tower, are all it possesses." Water and forage are procurable here.

Kharmálik to Farrah—20 miles. The road leads across a desolate plain; then, over a low pass, enters a stony valley: Numerous ruins near the road indicate that the district was once well populated. The plain is totally devoid of drinking water.

"The appearance of Farrah a short way off," writes Captain Marsh, "is imposing. Its high embattled and bastioned walls, its broad, well-kept ditch, and fine large gate and drawbridge give it the air of wealth and ease. But what a delusion is this! On entering the city I was

surprised to see its fallen state. The size of the interior is, perhaps, the third of Herát ; but it does possess twenty huts, and those all in ruins. Where is the city of Farrah ? Nowhere."

Farrah owes its destruction to the Persians and the Afgháns. In 1837 the Persians besieged and laid it waste because it belonged to Afghánistán. In 1852 the Barakzye Afgháns completed its destruction because it was dependent upon the Saduzye Afghán rulers of Herát. What Farrah was before the first of these events Conolly bore testimony in 1832. After speaking of it as a town possessing two thousand houses, he adds : "The land is fertile and much grain is cultivated, as the 'shepherds for many miles are supplied with it from hence. . . . The Furrah-rúd " (river of Furrah) "is in spring a wide and deep river, and there is always sufficient water for much cultivation." Ten years previously Mr. Fraser had described it as "a city as large as Nishapur, situated in a valley among hills, with about twenty villages and many gardens." Again, I repeat, with peace and security for life and property its revival would be assured.

I have stated that from Siah-áb runs the direct road to Herát *viâ* Giráneh, avoiding Farrah and Sabzwar. It is worthy of consideration whether this route might not be ultimately made the main line of communication. It is shorter ; and a force stationed at Giraneh would command alike Farrah and Sabzwar. Ferrier, after alluding to the strength of the fort as it was five-and-thirty years ago, thus writes regarding the position. "The position is important. It commands the passage of the river and the defiles in the mountains of the south. A small force quartered there might maintain its authority in the districts of Sabzwar, Farrah, Laush, Bakwa, Gulistan, Gour, and Sakkar, Giráneh being the central point round which converge

these localities—information,” he emphatically adds, “for the English and the Russians!” God grant that our countrymen may profit by the hint!

I may add that the road from Giráneh to Herát runs by Ab-i-Kúrmah and Sháh Jahán, and joins the Sabzwar road at Kash Jabran, a few miles above Sabzwar itself. The distances may be thus computed from Ferrier's journal. From Kash Jabrán to Sháh Jahán about nine hours caravan Journey, or about 20 miles; from Shah Jaran to Giráneh 56 miles. The country during the greater part of the way is described by Ferrier as well wooded and abounding in game, notwithstanding an almost entire deficiency of water.

I return now to the route by Farrah and Sabzwár. The distance between those two places is eighty miles. “There are,” writes Captain Marsh, “no villages—a vast jumble of valleys and hills, with small plains, inhabited only by a nomadic people. Each place has its name, but if the traveller finds tents at the same place twice he is lucky.” Captain Marsh accomplished the journey in three days, by Khúsh, Kilamúsha, and Darwázai. At each of these places he found water. Indeed, after the first 25 miles, the traveller follows, with a few deviations, the valley of the Rúd-i-Adrashkán. Regarding this river Ferrier observes that an army marching from Herát in the summer months should follow its course, as the commander would then be free from anxiety regarding the supply of water for his men and cattle. The hint should not be forgotten by an army which should march to Herát.

Sabzwár is eighty miles from Herát. It lies at the extremity of a large oblong plain, ten or twelve miles in circumference. The fort, prettily situated, is not formidable. The country around it is well cultivated, and abounds in flocks and herds. Water and supplies are

abundant. A Hindú, who visited it in 1823, compared it, for fertility, with the best parts of Hindústán.

The road between Sabzwár and Herát needs no special description. It is good and level and passable for wheeled carriages of all descriptions. Supplies of all kinds are abundant.

The following are the stages—easily, if considered advisable, to be divided :—

Sabzwár to Kásh Jabrán—21 miles. Midway is a water reservoir, now in ruins. At Kásh Jabrán the direct road to Kandahar branches off, taking the route by Giráneh.

To Adrashkán—11 miles, about a mile on the Sabzwár side of the river of the same name.

To Sháh Beg or Bad — 23 miles. Five miles after crossing the Rud-i-Adrashkán the traveller reaches the Rud-i-Gaz, a rapid stream, fifteen or twenty yards broad, whose waters flow into the Adrashkán a little to the west of the village of that name. Six miles further the ruined caravansarai of Mír Allah is reached. It is surrounded by cultivation, and a fine stream of water runs under its walls. Six and a half miles further, again, the traveller passes a spring of sweet water on the left of the road. The dwarf reed, which provides sufficient fodder for horses, is here abundant; but the food of man has to be carried. Water is plentiful at Sháh Beg.

To Mír Dáúd—12 miles. The traveller descends from Sháh Beg. The descent is regular and gradual. The country is now uninhabited and uncultivated. Red and grey partridges abound. There is an artificial arrangement for the supply of water at Mír Dáúd, but under Afghán rule it has been but little cared for.

To Herát—18 miles. A good view of the city is obtainable from the last-named station. The traveller proceeds by a good road, 10 miles, to Rozeh Bágh, a royal

garden—in olden days planted with Scotch firs of great size and beauty. Little more than 4 miles further on, the Herirúd is reached. The breadth of the river at this point is about a hundred and fifty yards. Its bed is here hollowed out, and its waters run in fifteen separate channels, twelve feet wide and very deep, enclosed between two embankments formed of the earth taken out for the excavations. To the south of the river is a fine piece of pasture-land formerly thickly studded with gardens and villages.

I think that, considering the difficulties of the ground and the necessity for carrying all his supplies with him, our general would be well satisfied if he could accomplish this distance in four weeks.

Granting, then, for the sake of argument, that the commander of the British expeditionary force were to set forth to relieve Herát, threatened by the Russians, on the 10th April next, he could not hope to reach that place before the 22nd May. And be it remembered, he would march at a time of year when the heat is the most terrific, and the water is most scarce.

What are the chances of Herát being able to hold out against a Russian army for three months?

Herát, it may be said, has held out against a Persian army aided by Russians, for ten months. That which has been accomplished once may be accomplished again.

I shall show, on the evidence of the man most capable to give an opinion, on the evidence of Eldred Pottinger himself, that such a contention, however pleasant it may be, cannot be sustained.

In the first place Russians with their modern arms of improvement are infinitely superior to the Persian army of 1838-9, with its flints and its popguns: in the second, Eldred Pottinger declared that the siege of 1838-9

failed solely because the place was not scientifically attacked.

It may be taken for granted that the defences of Herát are certainly not better than they were in 1838--9. They have been occasionally battered since, but they have never been repaired. We may have, then, an absolute conviction that the account given by Kaye* of the state of the fortifications of Herát in 1838 is not underpainted in its application to the present day.

"The city of Herát, it has been said, stood within solid earthen walls, surrounded by a wet ditch. The four sides were of nearly equal length, a little less than a mile in extent, facing towards the four points of the compass. The most elevated quarter of the city was the north-east, from which it gradually sloped down to the south-west corner, where it attained its lowest descent. The real defences of the place were two covered ways, or *fausse-brayes*, on the exterior slope of the embankments, one within and the other without the ditch. The lower one was on the level of the surrounding country, its parapet partly covered by a mound of earth on the counterscarp, the accumulation of rubbish from the cleansings of the ditch. On the northern side, surrounded by a wet ditch, the citadel, once known as the Kilah-i-Aktyar-Aldin, but now as the Ark, overlooked the city. Built entirely of good brick masonry, with lofty ramparts and numerous towers, it was a place of considerable strength; but now its defences, long neglected, were in a wretched state of repair. *Indeed, when, in 1837, tidings of the advance of the Persian army reached Herát, the whole extent of the fortifications was crumbling into decay.*"

The italics are mine.

Such was, such is, Herát. Yet, being so, it successfully resisted a Persian army, aided by Russian officers, for ten

* "History of the War in Afghanistan." By Sir J. W. Kaye.

months. Upon that subject let us hear the opinion of the one Englishman within its walls, of the man of whom Kaye wrote: "The indomitable courage of Eldred Pottinger saved the beleaguered city."

"It is my firm belief," wrote that gallant Englishman in his journal, "that Mahomed Sháh" (the Sháh of Persia) "might have carried the city by assault the very first day that he reached Herát, and that even when the garrison gained confidence, and were flushed with the success of their sorties, he might have, by a proper use of the means at his disposal, taken the place in twenty-four hours."

That opinion, the opinion of a competent artillery officer, who successfully defended the crumbling ramparts, appears to me to be decisive of the question. It is clear that under ordinary circumstances Herát could not, if attacked now, resist a Russian force till the end of May. The only chance of her being able to do so would be the presence behind her ramparts of Lumsden and his companions. Lumsden is an experienced officer, and he has a very gallant following; but it seems to me, that if the Russians are provided with guns of the modern type, even the skill and courage of Lumsden and his companions could effect little, if it be true, as has been asserted, that the city can be commanded by a hill in its vicinity.

The reply, then, the reluctant reply, to the first query that Herát, if attacked now, could not hold out till the end of May, disposes, it seems to me, of the three questions raised by the *Times*. For, if the existing Russian force in the Transcaspian regions can take Herát before an English force could arrive before that city, and if, whilst the English force was advancing Russian reinforcements were likewise being pushed forward, it seems clear that the Power which has possession of the *point d'appui* must occupy the position of vantage. For whilst

the English have to traverse 514 miles, over a barren country, all hard-marching, carrying their supplies, the Russians have to march along an easy road from Kizil Arvat, only 523 miles to Herát, drawing their supplies all the way, from the northern frontier of Persia. That northern part of Persia is, by the testimony of Napier and other eye-witnesses, already a Russian province, possessing agents in every village. The march, then, of the Russian reinforcements from Kizil Arvat to Herát, though nine miles longer, is a far easier march to accomplish than the march of the British force from the Pishin Valley to the same place. Under ordinary circumstances, then, the Russian advance force, far from being isolated, will be supported by a main body as strong as the advancing English army, before that army could reach Herát !

Nor is the argument regarding supplies more tenable. The base of Russia for supplies will be the northern frontier of Persia, between two and three hundred miles from Herát ; the English base for the same purpose would be the country beyond the Indus, six hundred miles distant.

In connection with this subject, and as showing how much better prepared Russia is for her great spring than the outer world has any idea of, I annex here a letter written by Sir Edward Hamley in reply to one of the arguments used by the *Times*, upon which I have commented :—

“Seeing how inexpedient it is,” wrote General Hamley on the 22nd March, “to underrate an enemy, perhaps you will allow me a few words of comment on your contributor’s account of the Army of the Caucasus last Friday ; by which I shall also hope to justify my view of the necessity of concentrating our resources on a war with Russia, if such is to be. Accepting your contributor’s description of that

army, and his estimate of the number of men which it brought against the Turks in Armenia in 1877, still that forms no measure of the forces which Russia could now assemble on the Caspian. For in 1877 the vast home army of Russia was entirely occupied in operating against the Turks on the Danube. It is now disposable for the reinforcement of the Army of the Caucasus. Troops embarked at Odessa would reach Batoum in two days, the Caspian in three, and the present end of the Transcaspian Railway at Bami within the week. Nor would the severance of the communication across the Black Sea prevent the transit, for many railways cross Russia to debouch on the Volga, which forms a vast highway to the Caspian. Thus, the trial of strength would be not between the Army of the Caucasus and the Army of India, but between the forces which the two Empires could bring to bear in the theatre of war.

“Further, during the war of 1877, Persia, as a neutral, assembled an army of 40,000 men for the protection of her own soil. If that army were directed against us, in alliance with Russia, it would march by excellent roads within the Persian frontier to Meshed and the Heri Rud. If there is anything in the task that would thus be set us to authorize the belief that, besides dealing with it, we could also maintain a British force of the present strength in Egypt, I shall rejoice to hear of it, but I have failed to discover it.”

The argument of this letter is unanswerable. It goes to confirm my conviction that unless an English force can reach Herát before Russia, take possession of that city, the entire province, which has been for ages the bulwark of India, will be for ever lost.

What, meanwhile, is our position in India? We can dispose, in that country, of a regular force, inclusive of the

troops which have been lent to England for the Soudan, of 61,736 European, and 125,695 native troops, counting officers. The following table shows their component parts :—

NATIVE ARMY, INCLUDING OFFICERS.

Artillery	1,835
Cavalry	18,824
Infantry	101,926
Sappers and Miners	3,110
Total	125,695

BRITISH ARMY, INCLUDING OFFICERS.

	Bengal.	Madras.	Bombay.	Total.
Artillery	6,209	2,491	2,786 =	11,486
Cavalry	2,868	956	478 =	4,302
Engineers	201	43	48 =	292
Infantry	29,222	8,217	8,217 =	45,656
	<u>38,500</u>	<u>11,707</u>	<u>11,529 =</u>	<u>61,736</u>

This is the peace establishment, a total of 187,431, to guard India, and, we will hope, to maintain Herát. Of course it may be greatly increased. It is satisfactory to learn that Lord Dufferin has already issued orders that two hundred men shall be added to each regiment, and equally so that enlisting has again become popular in India. It is an additional satisfaction to feel that the destinies of India are in the hands of a man who possesses the absolute confidence of the English people.

The exact mode in which the army available for field service may be employed must depend on circumstances. England knows that her generals on the spot, if left unfettered, will conquer even the impossible. But they may

read, as every one may study, with advantage, the words uttered last May on the subject by our most accomplished strategist :—

“ I will suppose Russia,” said Sir Edward Hamley, “ to have made her next step—a step which need surprise nobody ; many Indians look on it as already virtually accomplished—and occupied Herát. We know when she will do this—in a moment of perplexity to England. As to the how, perhaps by first occupying it with a Persian garrison (not to alarm us too much), and afterwards, by some subsequently announced Treaty, replacing that garrison with Russian troops. This may easily be done before we are aware, especially if we follow the plan of respecting Russian susceptibilities so far as not even to keep ourselves informed of what she may be doing. And it was a feature of Skobelev’s plan of invasion, now become absolutely feasible, ‘ to organize masses of Asiatic cavalry, and hurling them on India as our vanguard, under the banner of blood and rapine, thus bring back the times of Tamerlane.’ We may therefore wake up to find this programme in execution, with Russian troops to any extent massed along the line of the Transcaspiian railway, ready to support those in front. Now, on our side, we have of late increased the force at Quetta, and planned a system of local defence for Beloochistán ; but our comparatively insignificant field force is 220 miles from the Helmund. That is one case. The other is that we had a strong British Governor in Kandahar, and a strong British force on the Helmund and on the road to Kábul—the railway completed to Kandahar—in case of a movement from Turkistan against Kábul, a force on our side on its way to occupy that city, if not already there, and new recruiting grounds open to us amid warlike populations. Surely there can be no question as to which of these two sets of circumstances would give us

most influence in Afghánistán, most power to oppose Russia, and to maintain confidence in India. And we must remember that four years ago we could have done this and more than this. The whole country was going to pieces for want of strong rule. We were actually hunting for rulers. We set up one at Kábul, and another at Kandahar, who was soon afterwards removed, and the whole country placed under the present Amír. Before and since that event the unwavering theory of successive Governments of India has been that the Amír is to be kept from Russian influence, and to be maintained and supported in alliance with England. But when we ask what steps have been taken for carrying this theory into practice, I fear we shall not find much that is satisfactory. Perhaps the utmost we could in present circumstances promise ourselves, in meeting a Russian advance, would be that after heavy fighting and vast expenditure we should succeed in gaining those positions which are now open to our grasp, and our presence in which might obviate the risk of war.*

“I have said nothing about a British occupation of Herát. Yet that too was open to us four years ago, and not only open to us, but contemplated, in certain contingencies, by the Government of India. If I refrain from speaking of it it is because I fear at the outset to excite the opposition, and possible refusal to consider any forward movement, of those who are already hampered by the opinions they formerly expressed. I am aware, too, of the strong reasons that exist against straining our resources by embracing points so distant in our first operations. But I will confess that as an abstract military plan for the defence

* “And here I may mention that, since this paper was printed, I have seen evidence that most of the views here set forth are shared by an Indian Officer whose name would be at once admitted as of almost decisive influence in the question.”

of India under present conditions, and supposing sufficient additional troops to be forthcoming, that which most strongly recommends itself to my mind is a strong British Government at Kandahar, wielding an army whose advanced troops should be at Kábul and Herát, based on Kurrachee, with railway communication at least thence to Kandahar. I believe it is considered that great part of such an army could be supplied from our present Indian forces. However, I will not enlarge on this plan, though I imagine it is what a strong Power, thinking more of security than expense, might be expected to adopt. But, assuming that we wish to keep our hold on this rampart of India, it is urgently necessary to take steps while the Russian preparations are still undeveloped. We must at once obtain such a settlement of its boundary as I have endeavoured to sketch. And military reports on the whole country, from this frontier to positions securing or commanding Herát, and thence to the Helmund, should be framed forthwith. Our ignorance of all this is, considering its importance, astonishing. While Russian officials have explored up to and beyond Herát, and elsewhere along the Afghán and Indian frontier, our own officers have been discouraged, indeed prohibited, from obtaining personal knowledge of those regions, so that the scanty information I have been able to give about them is from those who acquired it almost by stealth. An extreme care not to wound, by showing suspicion, the innocent candour of those guileless beings, Russian statesmen, appears to have been our ruling motive, and is probably dignified by the name of diplomacy. The frontier is most important to us, yet no one can say where the frontier is. In a few years we may be fighting on the Helmund, or the Heri-rúd, yet we know nothing of the military features of the region."

One word in conclusion as to the composition of the

Anglo-Indian army. Of the British troops I need say nothing ; but with respect to the Indians I am glad to be able to express my absolute conviction that a Sikh regiment, led by British officers, is quite the equal of a Russian regiment ; that a Gúrkha regiment, similarly led, is likewise, at least the equal of a Russian regiment ; that the Gúrkahs of Nepál, led by British officers, are equally as able to meet the shock ; that the Indian Irregular Cavalry can successfully dare the Cossack to any encounter. The material, then, of the force which may have to meet Russia on the frontier of India is all that can be desired. The only fault is that it is so small. I repeat, then, the advice which has recently been so strongly urged upon the Government by the one strategist who has never been at fault : I would urge them to abandon the position in the Soudan, where—to use the words of Louis XV. at the battle of Laffeldt in 1747—“ England fights for all and pays for all,” to the advantage of the “ all,” and to transport the army employed there to the spot in India where the dearest interests of our country are threatened. It would be necessary to stipulate, if this policy were carried out, that the General-in-Chief should be left behind. Lord Wolseley might replace the heroic Gordon in a new Khartoum. We have yet, in India, in Roberts, in Charles MacGregor, in Donald Stewart, in Macpherson, and in others also on the spot, men who have proved, on the hardest and most trying of fields, that “ whilst no military qualification is wanting, the fount of honour is full and fresh within them.” In England, too, in the able and cultivated commander who stormed Tel-el-Kebir, who has studied the question of the Indian frontier, in a way such as no man but Charles Macgregor has studied it—in Sir Edward Hamley—we possess a leader the compeer even of such men as these !

CHAPTER X.

RUSSIA'S ATTACK ON PANJDEH AND ITS MOTIVE.

No cause was ever advanced by exaggeration. The cause I am pleading in this chapter is the cause of the English people. Before I conclude it I shall show how their prosperity is bound up in the maintenance of our Indian empire ; how the loss of that magnificent dependency would affect the position of every man, every woman, and every child in these islands from the highest to the lowest. Convinced as I am that the occupation by Russia of Herat, the outlying fortress which covers India, would be the prelude to an invasion of India, I shall indicate the purpose which has prompted the Russian general on the spot to make that sudden attack on the Afghans of Panjdeh which roused all England to indignation on the morning of Thursday, the 9th April. And, that I may not be accused of exaggeration I shall, in describing that attack, quote the words used in the House of Commons on Thursday evening by one who has lost no opportunity of declaring his faith in Russia : who, addressing his present constituents in 1879, declared that he had "no fear of the territorial extensions of Russia, no fear of them whatever ;" that he thought "such fears old women's fears"—I shall quote the words used by the Prime Minister of England.

In a previous chapter I showed that when the British Commissioner, Sir Peter Lumsden, arrived, in accordance with an arrangement agreed to by the Government of the Czar, at Panjdeh, he was not met there by the Russian Commissioner, but that, shortly after his

arrival, Russian troops seized the posts, important, because valuable for aggressive purposes, of Pul-i-Khátun, Zul-fagar, and Pul-i-Kishti; that the British Government had addressed serious remonstrances to St. Petersburg on the subject; and that, after a very slight discussion it had been arranged between the two Governments that Russia should retain the positions her troops had occupied, pending the definition of the frontier by the Commissioners of the two nations. The arrangement was generally regarded as a very unsatisfactory arrangement for England, but it had been made by the British Government, and the British people, with a great deal of smouldering disgust, and with a strong conviction that they were being duped, were obliged to await the result.

The Ministers of Great Britain duly communicated this agreement to Sir Peter Lumsden. It may be presumed that the Ministers of Russia likewise duly communicated the agreement to their general on the spot—the general commanding at Pul-i-Kishti, General Komaroff; although that general informed Captain Yate that he had not received it. Whether he received it or not, is a matter between himself and his Government. It is clear that the Ministers of Russia are responsible to the Ministers of England for the due observance of the arrangement made between the two nations. From those Ministers must the British Government demand reparation.

On the morning of Thursday, the 9th April, the public were startled by an announcement made in the *Standard* newspaper that the agreement between the two countries had been violated, and violated by Russia; that Russian troops had made a premeditated attack upon the Afgháns. Second editions of the other morning papers confirmed the news which the *Standard* had been the first to announce.

That same evening the Prime Minister of Great Britain explained the matter in the House of Commons. After some introductory remarks, he said :—

In the first place there are two things admitted—namely, that an attack was made on the Afgháns by the Russians and that the Afgháns were defeated. On those two points there is no doubt—defeated, as we are informed, after a gallant fight. The Russian allegations are mainly these. I will not attempt to give them in strict form, but the House may depend upon the substance of my recital. The Russians attacked the Afgháns, as they state, after being provoked by acts of hostility so termed—the nature of which we are not distinctly informed of—on the part of the Afgháns. When the fighting was over the Russians retired. They retired, according to a phrase used in one document, to their previous positions, according to the other document, to the left bank of the Khushk. These two phrases may be exactly equivalent. I am not prepared to say they are not, but I mention them both because they are used in the two accounts which have reached us. It is next alleged that English officers directed the Afgháns without taking part in the actual engagement, and finally it is stated that the Russian commander sent an escort to protect the English officers after the Afgháns were defeated, but that the English officers had themselves left the ground when the escort arrived, so that there was no occasion for it to act. These are the principal allegations that have reached us as the allegations of the Russian Government.

The date of the engagement is the 30th of March, and perhaps I may say that the earliest intelligence of the most material of the facts I am about to recite only reached Lord Granville and myself this morning. Well, now I come to the allegations made by Sir Peter Lumsden and our own officers, to which I need scarcely say that, as a matter of course, we give credit, and which undoubtedly call for very grave attention. In the first place it is stated that no forward movement of any kind was made by the Afgháns before or since the 17th of March—the 17th of March being the date of the telegram I shall now recite. On the 29th of March we were informed—and when I say “we” I speak of Sir Peter Lumsden’s telegram sent to us—we were informed that, notwithstanding the Russian assurances of the 17th of March—this is the substance of the telegram which the House will no doubt recognize, because it was the substance of the statement made by me in this House and sent to St. Petersburg and recognized there, and returned thence with a certain addition stated in this House at the

time—on the 29th of March we were informed by Sir Peter Lumsden that, “notwithstanding the Russian assurances of the 17th of March that the Russian forces would not advance from the position they then occupied provided the Afgháns should not advance nor attack them, or unless some extraordinary circumstance should happen, such as a disturbance in Panjdeh, the Russians were drawn up in force almost within range of the Afghán position, though the Afgháns had neither attacked nor advanced, and Panjdeh was perfectly quiet;” that every endeavour was being made by the Russians—this is in the nature of a general statement—to induce the Afgháns to begin the fight; and that the Russian forces had attempted to forcibly pass through the Afghán pickets. The next point is that on the failure of those attempts Captain Yate met the chief of the Russian staff by appointment, and was informed that no such arrangement as that referred to in the telegram of the 17th March as to the non-advance of the Russians had been received. (“Oh.”) This has been made the subject of proper communication. Next, that the chief of the staff, whose name I do not recollect, would not give an assurance to Captain Yate that the Afgháns would not be attacked without previous notice, and he claimed the right to turn out the Afghán posts whenever they might inconvenience the Russians, without reference to any third party. That, of course, must be taken in connection with the statement immediately preceding—that he had not received from St. Petersburg instructions corresponding with the telegram of the 17th March. Next we learnt that on the 29th of March Sir Peter Lumsden desired Captain Yate again to see the Russian commander and effect an amicable arrangement if possible. We learnt, on the 7th of April, that down to the 30th of March the Afgháns had made no forward movement before or since that telegram of the 17th of March. On the 7th of April we also learnt that Captain Yate had, on the 1st of April, sent a note from a point which he had reached with all the British officers and escort safely on the previous day at 8 P.M. on the way to Gulran. It stated that the Russians had attacked and defeated the Afgháns, and had occupied Panjdeh on the 30th. The Afgháns were said to have fought gallantly and to have lost heavily, two companies being killed to a man in their entrenchments. The survivors retreated along the Maruchak road. The British officers were neutral in the engagement. The House will not be surprised when I say, speaking with measured words in circumstances of great gravity, that to us, upon the statements I have recited, this attack bears the appearance of an unprovoked aggression. (Cheers.) We have asked for explanations from the Russian Government. There has not yet been time to receive such explanations. We shall endeavour to arrive at a just conclusion on the

facts. But before receiving our communications yesterday, and when we had not the important communications of this morning, but something preliminary in the same direction, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg reported to us last night at forty minutes past five in these words :—"The Minister for Foreign Affairs expresses his earnest hope and that of the Emperor that this unhappy incident may not prevent the continuance of the negotiations" (laughter); and he also reported a statement of M. de Giers that the Russians retired to their previous positions and did not occupy Panjdeh. I may say that I have laid these statements before the House as being the incomplete and partial statements which the very short time that has elapsed since the receipt of the news alone enables me to offer, and they are as much as our public duty will permit us to make; and I think I may say that they comprise the whole of the material statements of fact which have reached us upon this important, and for the moment I may say very painful, matter.

Later on, during the same evening, the Prime Minister supplemented the above statement with another. He said :—

"I had intended, either on the motion to report progress or on the actual report of the resolutions with the Speaker in the chair, to mention that since I spoke at the commencement of the evening a telegram has been received from Sir Peter Lumsden, which conveys what I may call a qualification of one of the statements which he had made. The statement I made on the authority of Sir Peter Lumsden was, as will be remembered by the House, because I repeated it twice, that the Afgháns had not made any advance either before or after the arrival of the telegram of the 17th of March. But Sir Peter Lumsden states to us in a later telegram that when the Russians immediately threatened an attack on the Afghán position by advancing in force to Ak Tapa, the Afgháns threw out vedettes to their front and extended their pickets to Pul-i-Khisti, on the left bank of the Khushk, and gradually strengthened it until on the 30th, the bulk of their force had been transferred across the river. That is the qualification which he conveys. He goes on to say that, in his opinion, that does not properly constitute an advance, but was the occupation of a more advantageous position. But I presume he evidently considers that the question might be raised as to what did or did not constitute an advance, and he is desirous that the British Government should be placed in the possession of all the facts. I give the qualification to the House precisely as Sir Peter Lumsden has given it."

To this statement by Mr. Gladstone I may add the more recently received explanation of General Komaroff:—

“On the 25th March our detachment approach Dash Kepri. On our side of the river Khushk, close to the bridge, I found an intrenchment occupied by the Afgháns.”

It is not necessary to continue. If Komaroff did not want a conflict why did he approach an intrenchment “occupied by the Afgháns”? The term, “our side of the river,” proves that Komaroff had prejudged the question. The river runs through territory which has been tributary to Herát since 1863, and even earlier!

Now, what is this story, summarized in a few plain words? It is simply, that the Russians at Ak Tapa threatened to attack the Afgháns at Panjdeh; that, on seeing the Russians advance, the Afgháns, not caring either to run away or to remain in a defenceless position to have their throats cut, took up a new alignment; that the Russians then attacked defeated them, and took Panjdeh; that the Afgháns then retired to Maruchak. The Russians, by their action, gained perfect command of the route leading by the Khushk valley to Herát, the route traversed by Captain Abbot in 1840, and described in pages 136-40 of this book; and they now face Maruchak, about midway between Panjdeh and Bala Murgháb, covering another road to Herát, the road traversed by Vambéry and Grodekoff, described in pages 144-6.

Now Russia is a great Power, and Afghánistán is the subsidised ally of England. The Amír of Afghánistán is in fact paid by England to guard the outlying redoubt which covers the approaches to India. That outlying redoubt is the country known under the generic name of Herát. It comprises the city of that name, the valleys of the Heri-rúd, the Khushk, and the Murgháb, as far as Sarakhs on the one side and Robot Abdullah Khán on

the other. This territory has been violated in a time of profound peace by a Power which, only fifteen months ago, was far removed from the extremest border claimed by the Afgháns, and which has since insidiously crept up to that border.

If such a thing had happened in Europe; if, for instance, France, in 1867-8, had suddenly pounced upon the Duchy of Luxemburg, which had been given to her by the King of Holland, would Germany have allowed it for a moment? The march of a single regiment across the border of that Duchy would have been accepted as a declaration of war. Why, the very claim to Luxemburg made by Napoleon III. very nearly brought about such a result! Is there, then, to be a law of nations in Europe, and no law of nations in Asia? Are we to be swift to repel on the one continent, and to turn our face to the smiter on the other? I ask this question because we are, at this moment, turning our face to the smiter on the banks of the Murgháb, and unless we suddenly recoil, and put down both feet, and, pointing to the frontier of 1872-3, say to the smiter, "thus far shalt thou come but no further," we run the greatest risk of losing India.

These are not empty words: they are words of truth and solemn warning. Any one who chooses to read between the lines can detect easily enough the reason for the action of General Komaroff. To those who cannot I will explain it.

First, let me recall to the recollection of the reader the general principle of the policy of Russia as described by the statesman of this century who knew her thoroughly, by the lamented Lord Palmerston. The words are quoted at pages 38-9 of this volume. Let the reader apply them to the action of General Komaroff and the excuses made by M. de Giers, as that action and those excuses have been

stated by Mr. Gladstone. "The policy of the Russian Government," wrote Lord Palmerston, "has always been to push forward its encroachments as fast and as far as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments would allow it to go." "In furtherance of this policy the Russian Government has always two strings to its bow—moderate language and disinterested professions at St. Petersburg and at London; active aggression by its agents on the scene of operations. If the aggressions succeed locally the St. Petersburg Government adopts them as a *fait accompli* which it did not intend, but cannot in honour recede from. If the local agents fail they are disavowed and recalled, and the language previously held is appealed to as a proof that the agents have overstepped their instructions." Is it possible to describe more exactly, with more absolute precision, the courses which Russia is now pursuing at London, at St. Petersburg, and on the Murgháb? She has adopted the aggressions made by Komaroff as *faits accomplis*; she has, if we may believe the St. Petersburg correspondent of the *Times* (11 April), *conferred decorations and rewards, by telegraph, upon those engaged*; while she has been assuring us at St. Petersburg that such aggressions were made in spite of her instructions. She adopted those aggressions because our Ministers had not the "pluck"—there is no other word for it, and it is a right good English word—to tell her that unless she retired there would be war!

For, let us consider, why is Russia making this spring just at this particular moment? *She wants the city of Herát.* To gain that city is the end and aim of all her movements. Herát is comparatively weak now; her fortifications are in disrepair; there is no English force within five hundred miles of it. If Russia can only get possession of Herát now, no power on earth will ever take it from her. The plains and the valleys follow the city. If she can only gain Herát

now she gains a new base where she can rest and wait for the opportunity to pounce upon India.

Yes ; that is the cause of these aggressions which in spite of their being disavowed are invariably accepted ; this is the meaning of the smooth words which serve to gain more and more time for Komaroff and Alikhanoff ! Whilst Russia is protesting in London, her generals are advancing down the Khushk, the Murgháb, and the Herírd. Her secret purpose is to seize Herát before India is ready, before British troops can be sent to the scene of action from the Soudan—to seize it, to fortify it, and to use it as a menace to India !

What the effect upon India of the acquisition of Herát by Russia would be, I described in language to which I can add little, in a paper I wrote for the Patriotic Association in 1879. What, I asked then, will mean the occupation of Russia by Herát ? I added :

It will mean simply this : that the gateway leading into our Indian Empire has been occupied by our enemy. It will mean that henceforth there will be no peace for the people of India, no security for trade, no money for improvements. The English in India will live under a continual threat—not at first of invasion, but of the intrigue which corrupts their native soldiers, which wins over their native allies, which makes every man doubtful of the morrow. In a word, they will live in a fortress which is being mined, and which they will know is being mined. . . . India would resemble a tenanted mansion, the keys of the doors of which were held by robbers daily engaged in attempting to corrupt the servants on the basement. What would become of her revenues then ? Industry, the cause of the wealth of nations, would be paralyzed, and a few years would witness a national bankruptcy.

In a word, the occupation of Herát by Russia would be a permanent menace to India.

Another attempt is now being made by Russia to hoodwink our ministers, and again have our ministers been hoodwinked. They have accepted the assurances from

St. Petersburg that no reply can be received from General Komaroff for seven or eight days. Now, on this point, I have received a communication from a gentleman well acquainted with the Trans-caspian regions, which he has permitted me to use. He writes : " The *Daily Telegraph* is right in stating that the Russian telegraph line extends to within 120 miles of the Russian posts near Panjdeh. As the Russian couriers are compelled to travel at the rate of ten miles an hour it is clear that it would require but twelve hours to receive despatches from St. Petersburg." The cause of this deceit is obvious : it is to gain time to carry out the nefarious design against Herât !

In a hostile criticism on the first edition of this book, the writer, a Blue-ribbonite, remarked that there was a large and growing number of Englishmen who were inclined to regard India as a dead weight on the people of these islands. It is scarcely necessary to reply to the ignorant folly displayed in such a remark, but as there are many who are not aware of the manner in which these islands benefit by the connection, I think a useful purpose will be served if I conclude this chapter with an extract from a lecture delivered on the subject in the theatre of the Society of Arts on the 4th March, 1881, by one of the most accomplished and instructed of men, Mr. J. M. Maclean. " It is hardly necessary," said Mr. Maclean in the body of his admirable address, " to insist upon the obvious material gains which accrue to England from the possession of an Eastern Empire. A simple enumeration of them will suffice. In the first place it is no slight advantage to us that the Government of India disburses in this country 16 millions sterling a year, out of the revenues collected from Indian taxpayers. The English nation, it is true, does not take this money from the people of India without giving them something in exchange for it." After

stating the nature of the exchange Mr. Maclean thus continued :

“The indirect gains of private enterprise in India are also very considerable. British India ranks now with France, Germany, and the United States among our best customers. The United Kingdom supplies her with three-fifths of her whole import of merchandise. . . . Nor do Englishmen make profits only on the import trade into India. The greater portion of the export trade is controlled by English houses, settled in Presidency towns ; and four-fifths of the shipping engaged in the following commerce of India belongs to English owners. If you trace the sale of a bale of Indian cotton exposed for sale in the Liverpool market, you will probably find that in all its successive stages, after being grown and picked by the native cultivator, it has been made ready and brought to the market by English capital and labour. An English agent has selected it in the producing district ; it has been carried down to the sea-coast by a railway company working with English capital ; an English mercantile firm in Bombay has pressed it, and sold the bill of exchange against it through an English broker to an English bank ; and it has been transported from Bombay to Liverpool on board an English steamer. So, again, with regard to the piece goods trade from this country, it is entirely financed and managed by Englishmen till the bales pass into the hands of the native dealers in the bazaar of Bombay. You will readily calculate how many different profits this vast trade which may be valued at a hundred millions sterling, yields to all these classes of English manufacturers, merchants, bankers, middlemen, shippers, engineers, and other mechanical experts. And when you add to such mercantile gains the private remittances sent home by English tradesmen and professional men settled in India, and by the civil and military servants of the Crown, you can realize how immense, in the aggregate, must be the contributions which our great dependency annually makes to the wealth of England. There is not a town, it may be said without exaggeration that there is not even a hamlet, in this country in which the fructifying influence of the capital thus acquired is not felt, although it may not be always recognised ; and I do not know any industry in the United Kingdom, small or great, which would not suffer loss, if the connection with India were broken off.”

These are some of the benefits resulting to England from her connection with India. How the connection is appreciated by the native princes and people of India,

even by those who, like Nepál, do not acknowledge the sovereignty of the Empress, has been made abundantly clear by the spontaneous offers of assistance which the mere threat of Russian invasion has evoked. Nothing is more manifest than that connection will be endangered if Russia be allowed to take Herát. We must not disguise from ourselves the fact that a loyalty which is fixed as long as we are victorious is not always proof against a long course of adversity. In his eloquent account of the fall of James II., Macaulay has described how the Prince who glibly uttered his '*est-ce possible*,' as he learned the defection of one great noble after another, took an opportunity shortly afterwards of decamping himself. There remains, then, the great question—the question the most important of all—how to preserve Herát for Afghánistán. Before this all other questions sink into insignificance. In the presence of an enemy so unscrupulous it is a question beset with difficulties. The very act of repairing the crumbling walls of the town might, on the principle adopted by the wolf towards the lamb, be denounced by Russia as an act of hostility. Yet, at all hazards and with all speed it should be attempted; meanwhile, we must concentrate all our available troops in the Pishin valley, ready for a prompt advance.

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1885

Marvin, Charles Thomas
The Russians at the gates
of Herat

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